

The New Forest

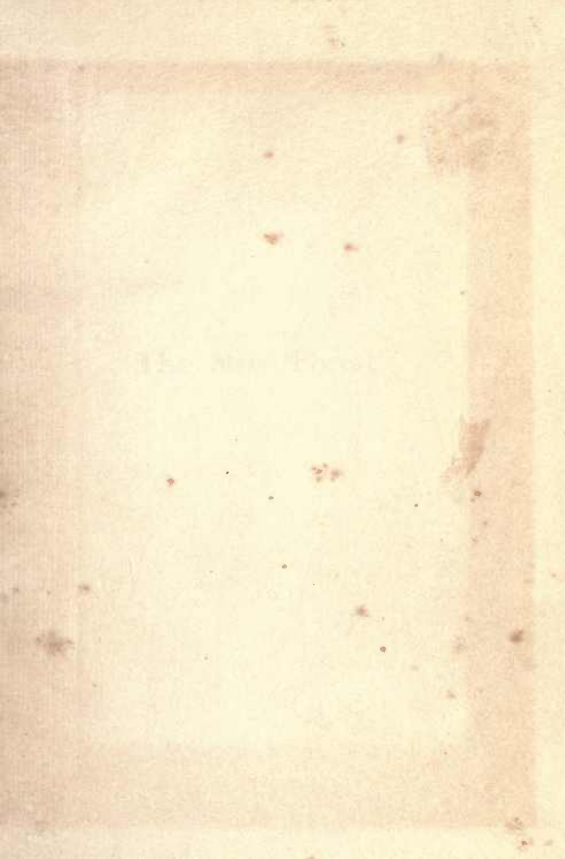
C. J. CORNISH





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THE ADDER-HUNTER.

The New Forest

By

C. J. Cornish

Author of "Wild England," "The Naturalist on the Thames,"
etc., etc.

New Edition

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1906

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CHAPTER I

THE CENTRAL FOREST AND ITS CAPITAL

The wholly foreign character of its creation—Its vast extent—The alleged cruelty in its afforesting—Modern views—The nature of forest laws—The forest preserved by their survival—Lyndhurst the centre and capital of the forest—The Verderers' Hall and Court—The pilgrimage to Mark Ash—Swan Green—The wild and open forest—The Lymington stream—The hush of the forest—The progressive splendour of the trees—The wealth of ornament in the old woods—The charcoal-burner's hut—Voices of the forest—Alone in the sanctuary.

THE historical link which the New Forest has with the associations in every English mind is fixed to the era of the Normans. It was the foreign Norman and Angevin

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Kings of England who made and used the forest. It lay in the same county and within a ride of their palace and capital at Winchester; and they took their sport from Malwood on their way to Rouen, riding down after a few days' deer-shooting to Beaulieu or Lymington, where the galleys waited to take them across the Channel, much as the royal yachts wait in our day to take His Majesty across the Solent to Osborne.

But the subsequent part played by the forest as a hunting-ground for Kings, and a district exempt from the general law of the land and at the absolute disposal of the Sovereign, is entirely eclipsed by the picturesque and dramatic incidents which tradition has assigned to its violent creation by the first Norman monarch, and its requital, not only by the violent death of the second, but by those of two other children of the Conqueror in this fatal precinct. His son Richard, who was supposed to be in his

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disposition the special image of his father, when not yet of an age to be girded with the belt of knighthood, was the first victim. He is said to have been fatally injured by the branch of a tree when riding after a stag; and there is a record in Domesday Book of lands restored by his father to their rightful owner as an offering for Richard's soul.¹ The second son of the Conqueror who died in the forest was another Richard, an illegitimate child, whose death seems to have been forgotten in the greater catastrophes of the death of the elder Richard and of Rufus, which preceded and followed it.

Whatever belief is to be given to the tale of cruelty in its afforesting, the size and character of the district which the Conqueror devoted to his use as a "single and mighty Nimrod," by the simple act of putting it under forest law, is a measure of the scope of that imperial mind. The area was as large as that of the Isle of Wight. It was

¹ Freeman, "Norman Conquest," vol. iv., p. 609.

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bounded on the north by the line from the river Avon to the river Ouse, separating Hampshire from Wiltshire; by the river Avon on the west, down to Christchurch; by the sea from Christchurch to Calshot Castle; by the Southampton Water, and by the river Ouse. Within these boundaries are about 224 square miles, containing 143,360 acres of land, of which even now 90,000 acres are still within the boundary of the forest. Its natural features were such as to make it a hunter's paradise. From the swirling salmon river at Christchurch to the wide lagoon of Southampton Water, it exhibited, and still contains, almost every natural feature which made the forests "*regum penetralia et eorum maximæ deliciæ*" (the chief delight of Kings, and their secret and secure retreat). Fronted by the sheltered waters of an inland sea, and pierced by the four wide, beautiful, and commodious estuaries of Christchurch, Lympington, Beaulieu, and Southampton Water, its heaths, pools, wastes, thickets,



SALMON-FISHING AT CHRISTCHURCH.



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and bogs, studded and interlaced with good ground, producing deep and ancient woods, made it a natural and unrivalled sanctuary for game.

The charge against the Conqueror of "wasting" this district appears in its most violent form in the pages of Lingard: "Though the King possessed sixty-eight forests, besides parks and chases, in different parts of England, he was not satisfied, but, for the occasional accommodation of his Court, afforested an extensive tract of country lying between Winchester and the sea-coast. The inhabitants were expelled, the cottages and churches were burnt, and more than thirty square miles of a rich and populous district were withdrawn from cultivation and converted into a wilderness, to afford sufficient range for the deer and ample space for the royal diversion." "Many populous towns and villages and thirty-six parish churches," is the more circumstantial estimate of others. Voltaire first questioned this tradition on

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grounds of general historical criticism. Cobbett easily detected its improbability, from a mere examination of the *soil* of the forest. It could never have been a "rich and populous district," simply because for the greater part the soil is among the poorest in the South of England. Thirty thousand acres were in 1849 reported unfit either for agriculture, the growth of trees, or pasturage. The test of figures also throws a doubt on the destruction of the villages. In the original area of the forest there still remain eleven parish churches on sites where churches were in existence before the time of the Conqueror. "If he destroyed thirty-six parish churches, what a populous country this must have been!" writes Cobbett. "There must have been forty-seven parish churches; so that there was over this whole district one parish church to every $4\frac{3}{4}$ square miles."

The modern inference from these criticisms goes to the extreme of considering that in

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making the forest William confined himself to enforcing the forest law within its boundaries, thereby reserving the exclusive right of sporting for himself, while "men retained possession of their lands, their woods, mills, or other property, just as before, save for the stringent regulations of the forest law."¹

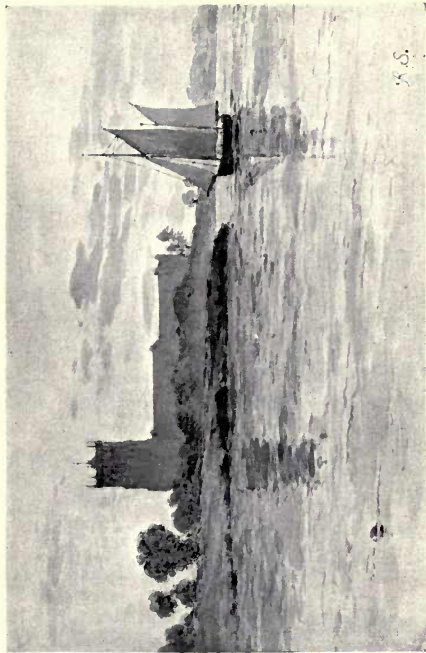
Even so the interference with liberty and property, due to this extraordinary Norman provision for the amusement of the monarch, is almost incredible to modern ideas.

"Forest law" made of the area to which it might at any moment be applied a kind of "proclaimed district," where the law of the land at once ceased to run, and the rights of property only existed under conditions which were *mainly*, but not entirely, directed to the preservation of game. Its excuse was that it was a convenient method of placing wild districts, infested by outlaws, under the strong government of the King, in place of

¹ "Agriculture of the New Forest," by the Hon. G. Lascelles, Deputy Surveyor, New Forest.

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the timid "presentments" of frightened villagers, and that it formed a reserve of men and munitions of war for the Sovereign. The assize of the forest of 1184 by Henry II. gives a good notion of the working of these laws in the New Forest, and a clue to the survivals which are still found there. No one might sell or give anything from his own wood, if within the forest, which would destroy it: only firewood (*estoveria*) was to be taken. The result was that no large timber could be felled, and this, therefore, ceased to be private property within the Crown forests. The King's foresters were to be answerable if this wood was destroyed. No one was to *agist* (turn out) his cattle before the King agisted his. The King could agist his fifteen days before Michaelmas, and closed the woods fifteen days after Michaelmas. No spring grazing was allowed, so saplings and seedlings had a chance to grow. Open spaces were to be cut where deer could be shot at, like the "rides" in



A.S.

CHRISTCHURCH HARBOUR.

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our pheasant covers. No tanner or bleacher of skins was to live in a forest, and "no receivers or thieves."

But the rigour of forest law was mitigated in the days of Henry III., the whole of whose charter of the forests is framed against the annoyance which the inhabitants had felt from the severity of the former laws. It provided that every free man should be allowed to "agist" his own wood in a forest when he pleased, and to have his own eyries of hawks, sparrow-hawks, falcons, eagles, and herons. It granted permission to drive pigs and cattle through the forest, and let them spend a night on the King's land, with other privileges, which were probably the origin of many "forest rights" now claimed in the district. Are we, then, to conclude that the hardships suffered by the inhabitants of the "Ytene," the Saxon name of the New Forest, were limited to such as were incidental to the enforcement of forest laws? Such a consoling answer can scarcely be

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given. In spite of the inaccuracies of the form in which it has come down to us, the tradition of the wasting of this particular forest and the confiscation of land¹ are too unanimous to be disregarded.

The "stiffness" and cruelty of such a course are too much in keeping with the character of the King who turned into a desert the whole district between the Humber and the Tees. The forest was perfectly suited by site and soil for William's purpose, and it is difficult to doubt that in its afforestation hardships were inflicted which were remembered long after the general hatred of the Normans had died away.

But it must not be forgotten that though the rigours of the forest laws as a means

¹ Freeman quotes an instance of confiscation from Domesday. "The sons of Godric Ralf hold under the King at Minstrad. Their father had three hides and a half of land. Now his sons have only half a hide. The rest of the ground is in the forest."

IN THE FOREST, NEAR LYNDDHURST.



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of preserving game relaxed, the protection given by them to the woods was never withdrawn, and it is to them that we owe the preservation of the ancient timber until the present day. When laxly administered, as in the days of Charles I. and the Commonwealth, the woods have been invariably destroyed; when enforced, as by James I., and later in the days of William III., the trees have increased, and descended to us as one of the finest national inheritances. The present management of the forest, under an Act passed in 1877, is based on the principle that all except some 20,000 acres, enclosed since the year 1700, shall remain open and wild. But in this wild area forest law still runs, and protects the timber from waste and robbery.

In the Verderers' Hall at Lyndhurst the survivals of forest law and forest customs appear by the dumb witness of fixed engines of justice as primitive as the oaks of Brockenhurst. One end of the bare old chamber is

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fitted up as a court, in which offenders against the custom of the forest, wood and fern stealers, or those who have transgressed the limits within which cattle may be kept, or other liberties of the forest, are presented by the "agisters," who play the part of the knights from the hundreds and townsmen from the township, who "presented" criminals in the shire moots. "Presented" the offender certainly is, for he is exposed to the public view in the most primitive dock existing in England. The prisoner sits on a kind of perch, to which he climbs by a step. Behind this is a square back with cross-pieces of black oak, with the rough axe-marks still showing, and immediately in front, beyond the narrow interval of the clerk's table, is the full bench of verderers. Assuming, as is probable, that this is a copy of the most ancient arrangement of such courts, we can imagine how some trembling wretch, with the prospect of maiming or blinding before him, must have felt before the scowl of the

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forest rangers of Norman or Angevin Kings, on this seat of justice over against him. Besides the rude accommodation for judges and prisoners, the court contains a recess filled with books on forest law, which, by that grace of congruity which seems inseparable from everything in this strangely perfect region, are screened by the most appropriate curtain that could be devised, the skin of a red deer. The walls are decorated by horns of deer, red and fallow. Whatever the history of the great stirrup which hangs upon the wall, and is said to have belonged to William Rufus, it is a notable relic, and thoroughly in place in this hall of woodland justice. It is clearly the stirrup in which the thickly-mailed feet of the days of plate armour, with their broad iron toes, were thrust, thick enough and broad enough to give "support" for the most ponderous horseman in his coat of steel, and so wide that the legend that all dogs which could not be passed through it were

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considered possible enemies to game, and therefore maimed, does not seem improbable, except in regard to dates.

Lyndhurst is by size and position the true capital of the forest. There stands the ancient Queen's House, to which the Verderers' Hall is attached, and in which the Deputy Surveyor of the forest has his residence, and on the high mound of natural verdure in the centre of the town the soaring spire of its church shoots up, and dominates the immense tract of woodland, of which it forms the natural centre.

The town has no mean outskirts or squalid surroundings. The woodlands run up to its old houses like a sea, and the parks surrounding the fine mansions which fringe the forest capital are mere incidents in its scenery, lost and absorbed in the wild woods around them. Cuffnalls Park, a grassy hill clothed with oaks and beeches, lies just outside the town, and leads the eye by an easy transition from the formal



THE QUEEN'S HOUSE, LYNDDHURST.

Alex. Ansted.

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gardens of the Lyndhurst houses to the uncovenanted graces of the natural forest. Beyond the park the road divides to Burley and Christchurch on the left, to Ringwood on the right, and at the parting of the ways the forest at once and without reserve flings itself across the field of sight. Thence to Mark Ash, the most renowned of all the ancient woods, the way lies through scenes in an ascending scale of beauty which mark this as the first path to be trodden by the pilgrim and stranger. The understanding needs time to eddy round the crowding forms that claim its homage. It is the Eleusinian Way, along which the genius of the forest seems to lead the neophyte gently by the hand, saying, "Look on this, and that, and that, first grasp the lesser, then the greater mysteries, until with eyes and understanding opened you may enter and enjoy the earthly paradise of perfect beauty which lies beyond."

Thus the mind keeps its sense of propor-

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tion, and the excitement and stimulus of this appeal to the sense of admiration is maintained as the appetite grows with the beauty which feeds it. Slow and lingering should be the tread, silent and solitary the traveller, in a first journey to the high places of the forest, assured that, though the first steps are through the scenes of laughing, rustic prettiness, by lawns and groves, the playgrounds of the forest children and pastures of the forest cattle, ground that in other times would have been sacred to Faunus and Pan and all their merry crew, he will at last pass beyond the ways of men, and find himself face to face with masterpieces of Nature's hand, before which he must stand silent and amazed.

From Cuffnalls Park two winding roads lead up the steep ascent on either hand. In the space between, sloping gently upwards towards the light, is neither field nor fence, but against the sky-line is ranged a crescent of oaks and beeches, fronted by most ancient

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thorns. Three shapes, three colours distinguish tree from tree; through their centre a green glade winds up into the wood, and from their feet a smooth lawn of turf flows gently down to the point at which the roads divide, watched on either hand by a sentinel oak.

“Swan Green” is the name of this beautiful lawn. Beyond its slope lies the village of Emery Down, after which the signs and sounds of human habitation disappear with a suddenness almost startling. The road lies through rolling tracts of the most wild and ancient forest land. Right and left the slopes are clothed with trees in the prime and vigour of their age. Some few are oaks; but the beech is the indigenous, or perhaps the growing, tree of this stately tract of forest, and from this point onwards the mind is incessantly invited to consider the manifold beauties of form which even one species of forest tree presents.

There seems no limit to the hall of

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columns which fades away into dim distance in the wood, though the space between the stems is clear and open. The gray trunks shoot straight upwards to the sky, each with its smooth surrounding lawn. The tallest beeches which spring on the slope of the hillsides seem to draw back with a certain reticence from the broad pathways of the glades, drooping their branches downward, and wrapping them round their feet with a dainty and almost feminine dignity and reserve. Others grow like oaks, flinging their branches abroad in wild, disordered tangles.

There are those among them which have already passed their prime, and yet scarcely show the symptoms of decay. In many beeches the first years of decline add dignity to their forms. The tree dies from the top; but at first this appears only by a cessation of upward growth. The branches at the summit thicken, cluster, and multiply, like the antlers on an old stag's horns, giving to



A COTTAGE AT LYNTHURST.

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the whole massive and weighty proportions in strange contrast to the usual graceful and feathery outlines of its race. In others, further advanced in the stages of decay, the vigour of the lower branches so arrests the eye that it scarcely travels beyond the mass of leafage, though above and from the centre of the healthy boughs an upright growth of bare gray limbs rises grimly naked and alone.

Some two miles from Lyndhurst the hush of the forest begins. If the wind is still and the trees motionless, there is a silence which can be felt. In winter or early spring, before the summer migrants have arrived, or the hum of insects has begun to stir the air, the sense of hearing is not excited by any form of sound. There are neither men nor children in this part of the wood, the cattle are away on distant lawns, the deer are hidden in the thick enclosures, and the great birds which haunt the forest are away, in the still grander and more solemn precincts

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of the most ancient woods. Beyond Emery Down the high wood gives place to a rolling natural park, clothed with heather, cotton-grass, and gray whortle-bushes, and studded with single trees, or small groups, in pairs and triplets, of perfect form. Here is seen that phase of beauty so often desired and seldom found, *distance* in the forest, bounded only by a far-off misty screen of luxuriant wood. Beyond this open park the imagination is kept in constant excitement and expectation by the increasing size and beauty of the trees. Each group seems to surpass the last, and to mark the ultimate limits of grace and size, until something even grander and more stately takes the pride of place. Their splendour dominates the mind to the exclusion of all other subjects of thought. You become a connoisseur not only in their general beauty, but in its particular forms. You analyze them into types, grades, and permanent varieties, and no longer compare them promiscuously, but

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form standards for the different classes. Some of the finest ancient beeches have apparently been pollarded, and so far from this proving a disfigurement in their ripe maturity, it gives them a variety of form and a spread of limb which makes a fine contrast with the towering domes which top the single stems of the natural tree. Many of the pollards seem to come late into leaf, and the effect is particularly fine when in spring their ruddy buds surround some other forest giant in the full glory of early growth.

On the left side of the road, some two and a half miles beyond Emery Down, there is such a group of immense spreading pollards, above which towers the rounded head of an unshrouded tree, capped with a cloud of vivid green floating leaf-buds.

Opposite the beech circle a low line of alders gives promise of a swamp, and the ground descends into a "bottom"; not the squashy river of grass usually known by that

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name in the Surrey coombes, but a flat, swampy valley of gray and lichen-covered heather and cotton-grass, scored and intersected by the manifold windings of a slow, dark stream, curling round masses of cattle-gnawed and ivy-strangled alders and willows, heaped and encumbered with soft mounds of black and gray mud, studded with little bulbous oak stems, stunted and decayed, and shattered by the lightning of the thunder clouds which follow the water. The struggle for life against water and lightning must also be made heavier by the force of the wind in this valley of desolation, for even the tough alders had been uprooted by the gales, and lay prostrate in the marsh, with cavernous hollows beneath their roots, haunted by water-rats and tiny trout. In the most stagnant parts white limbs of drowned oaks raise their skeleton arms above the marsh, and the ragged ponies which graze round the margin test carefully at each step the ground in

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which so many of their companions have sunk and perished when weak with winter and famine.

The colouring of this swampy hollow is in complete contrast to the brilliant tints of the sound lawns and high woods. It has only two tones, gray and black. Yet even there the finishing touch of Nature completes the picture. The black stream and alder clumps are fringed and studded with golden marsh marigolds, and over the gray mud creeps an exquisite little plant with five-lobed leaves and gray starry flowers like silver stone-crop. A low ridge of better soil divides this slow rivulet of the swamp from the bright waters of a typical New Forest stream, the Lymington River. On its banks the solemn beeches once more cluster, and the hurrying stream goes dancing through the wood golden clear with topaz lights, past the lines of columned trees, slipping from pool to pool with little impatient rushes, resting a moment in the

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deeper pools, then climbing the pebble beds which bar them in, and hurrying down to the sea at Lymington Haven.

This river, like that at Beaulieu, belongs wholly to the forest. Here it is a mere brook, with exquisitely rounded banks of turf and moss, as if the wood fairies who put the acorn and beech-nuts to bed for the winter had tucked in the coverlet on either side and then embroidered it with flowers. The pools are full of enormous "boatmen," which lurk under the banks and dart out at every leaf, insect, or stick which comes floating down the stream. Each morsel is seized, pulled about and examined by the creatures, like a company of Customs-house officers at a port; and as a steady rain of *débris* from the trees descends upon the stream throughout the day, they are kept busy from dawn till dusk. Even so near its source this stream sometimes overflows its banks. In one spot the whole of the surface roots of a beech have been pared clear of soil as if by a



A DEAD GIANT, MARK ASH,

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trowel. It is not a large tree, but the spread of root is fifteen paces across.

West of the river the ancient trees once more close in towards the road, and beyond them on either side are younger woods planted by the Crown. Very few young trees appear in this part of the old forest, but on the right hand of the path is a beautiful example of tree protecting tree from the destroying cattle. A most ancient crab-tree, hoary with lichen and green with ivy, has thrown its protecting arms round the stem of a fine young oak. The smooth, clean stem now shoots up clear of the old crab-tree, whose delicate pink blossom mixed with the black ivy-berries shows that it is vigorous still, in spite of its double burden of carrying the ivy and caring for the oak.

An example of the astonishing detail and completeness of the natural beauties of the forest—beauty presented on a scale so large that the absence of detail and ornament might well pass unobserved—may be seen

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round the stem of every great tree that fronts the road. Take, for instance, the base of the beech column which stands opposite to the grass track that leads to the left to the charcoal-burner's hut below Mark Ash. It is the base of a compound column, thicker than the piers of Durham Cathedral, with seven projecting pilasters. The bark is like gray frosted silver, crusted in parts with a scale ornament of lichen, and in the interstices between the pillars with short golden-brown moss. The rounded niches which encircle its base are laid out as natural gardens, which in April of a recent year were planted and arranged as follows: In one a violet bed, covered with blossom which touched the bark of the trunk; in the next a briar-rose, a foot high in young leaf; in the third three curling fronds of bracken fern; in the fourth a moss-grown billet of sere wood and a pile of last year's beech-mast; in the fifth a young woodbine, which had slipped into the inmost crevice between

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the sheltering pilasters, and was already adorned with little whorls of green leaves ; in the sixth a wood-sorrel, with trefoils of exquisite green, like chrysoprased ; and in the seventh niche four seedling hollies, a tiny rowan-tree, and a seedling beech as high as a pencil. The whole was encircled by a close carpet of moss turf and the débris of leaves. The eye sees these minor beauties in series and succession ; but no mere catalogue can convey an adequate idea of the delight and satisfaction afforded to the mind by this prodigal abundance of natural ornament.

The cries of the woodland birds, which hitherto had hardly broken the silence of the forest, showed that the attractions of cover, food, and water must be combined in a measure not yet encountered in the adjacent glades. The bright sun poured between the green leaves and reached the dark hollows among the pines below, and the wood rang with the cries of the larger and rarer birds

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which have here their haunt. The hooting and yelping of the owls, though it was noon-day, was almost like the intermittent cry of hounds that have strayed from the pack and are hunting some solitary deer. The laughing of the woodpecker, the harsh and angry screams of the jays, the crow of the cock-pheasant, and the cuckoo's call, showed that animal life, hitherto so scarce in this wealth of arboreal growth, was here abundant and in evidence. The only trace of man's presence was the rudest and most primitive dwelling known to civilized life. In the centre of a clearing, surrounded on three sides by a towering ring of monster beeches, was a deserted charcoal-burner's hut, with the "burning circle" in front of the door. Except for the setting of good English trees, it might pass for part of the kraal of some race of woodland dwarfs, with its "zeriba" in front. The last is a large circle of brush-wood, supported by posts and rails of rough oak poles. Within was a flooring of black



A CHARCOAL-BURNER'S HUT, BOLDERWOOD.

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ashes, neatly raked into a raised ring at a few feet from the circumference.

The hut looks like a white ants' hill covered with scales of turf turned grass inwards, with a kind of mushroom cap on the apex. The only sign that the dwelling was not constructed by savages is the square door and porch, hewn of roughly squared oak. A glimpse of the interior shows that the framework is a cope of strong oak poles, and the only furniture a couple of sacks of dry beech-leaves, a low wooden bench, and one or two iron pots. A similar hut in Gritnam Wood was inhabited throughout the year by an adder-hunter. He did not even indulge in the luxury of a beech-leaf mattress or a wooden door; but lived in health and comfort with a low oak bench for his bed, and a faggot of heather for curtain and door.

A narrow glen and stream, with an ascent bare of trees, forms a kind of precinct before the last and inmost circle of the wood, where

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the neophyte may pause and see revealed before him the final and growing secret of the forest. The voices of Dodona's doves echo softly throbbing from the grove, and invite him "to touch, to see, to enter," and be from henceforth one of the initiated. On either side the enormous beeches rise, some tossing their branches like the arms of Blake's angels, sweeping skyward with uplifted hands, others with huge limbs flung supine on the turf, others like slender pillars from which spring fretted vaults and arches, trees male and female, trees of architecture and trees of life, rising in measured order and gradual succession on the sides of a theatre of woodland turf. Where the solemn aisles diverge they are walled with holly, roofed with the green of the beech, and floored with flesh colour and gold, as the broken lights glitter on the carpet of moss and wind-sown leaves. Half of a clustered beech had fallen in one shock to the ground, smashing into ruin the tall hollies below it,

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and scattering their broken limbs in a yet wider circle of destruction. The scent of beech and holly from the crushed and broken fragments overpowered all the odours of the forest. Deer had been browsing on the fallen boughs, and three fallow bucks sprang up from behind the ruin and rushed through the hollies beyond. Nine fallen limbs, each a tree itself in size and proportions, lay spread upon the ground like the fingers of a fan. The coating of moss with which it was completely covered made it easy to walk up over the limbs to the point of fracture, and thence look down into the forest. In front lay beds of young holly glittering in the sun, the ground between them covered with the vivid green of wood-sorrel. Beyond and around, on every side, the towering forms of the gigantic trees stand clear, each behind each in ordered ranks, without movement or sound in the still air, except for the cooing of the ring-doves and the screams of the wood-owls

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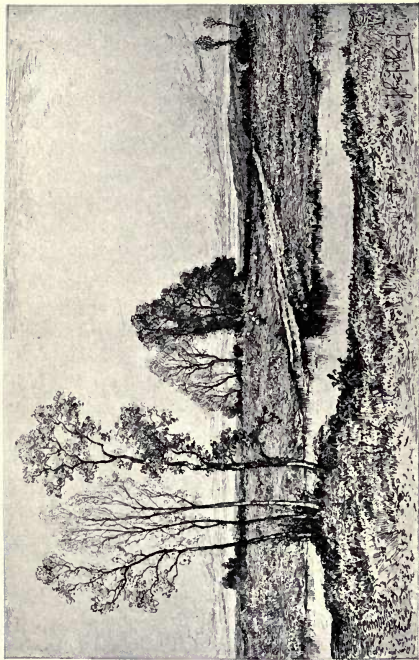
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the Solent. Beaulieu Heath is, perhaps, the finest of the open stretches of forest scenery. There is something so new, fresh, and exhilarating in the sudden presentation of this apparently unlimited stretch of high, open, level ground, swept by the volume of the oversea wind that comes rolling up from the Channel, which reacts on the mind with a kind of intoxication of space and air. Miles of whispering pines are the background to the heath; beyond all is open, level, and free, the ground falling imperceptibly till the near horizon is nothing but a level line of heather, below which the intersecting waters of the Solent are lost to sight, though the blue hills of the Isle of Wight rise like the background of a panorama far beyond the invisible strait which lies between. There are those who prefer the forest heaths even to the forest woods. Doubtless each gains by contrast, the more so that the change from the high woods to the sweeping moorland is often as



A HEATH IN THE FOREST, NEAR LYNTHURST.

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sudden as the shifting of a scene upon the stage.

Take, for instance, the wide stretch of Ober Heath, which fringes the great plantations of Rhinefield Walk, and runs almost down to Brockenhurst from the modern castle which has been built upon the site of the keeper's lodge at Rhinefield. The upper portion of the heath is like a scene in the Surrey pine districts, studded with self-sown Scotch fir and clothed with gorse bushes, rough heather, and a tiny dwarf willow, which creeps upon the ground like ivy, but otherwise is a perfect willow bush, studded in spring with tiny satin globes, like the "palms" of the common osier, but no larger than shot or tare-seed. Far away across the dark purple heather and golden gorse the quick stream of Ober Water runs through a flat green lawn to join the Brockenhurst River just above New Park, with the hill of Brockenhurst Manor breaking the sky-line to the right. The left side of the heath is

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fringed by heavy forest ; but in this case the transition from heath to wood is broken by a wide scrub of dwarf thorns, round as beehives, matted with heather and knots and beards of lichen. Some hundred acres must be covered by "Fleming's thorns," as this dense thicket is called. Those who have seen both compare it to the mimosa scrub of the African plains. Like the mimosa, it is a favourite haunt of game ; and the wild deer love to lie in its secluded and impenetrable jungle.

No fence or boundary marks the transition from heath to forest. The river slips from the common between clumps of holly and single waving birches, winds down a glade, and in a few yards is lost to sight among masses of oak, alder, ash, and pines. Looking backwards towards the sunset along this borderland, the rugged outlines of the gorse and fir, and the broken and wind-swept hollies and thorns which fringe the full-fed forest, give to the scene an air of wildness

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and confusion in striking contrast to the serene tranquillity which reigns within the solemn precincts of the wood. Ober Heath is an example of the forest moor inclosed by wooded hills. On Matley Heath, south of Lyndhurst, the converse may be seen: a barren heather-clad hill rising steadily from low-wooded ground on either side, and then descending in a long and gentle slope to an immense expanse of flat and barren moor. This wild and desolate tract is perhaps the largest unbroken stretch of heather and infertility in the whole forest. Under the names of Matley Heath, Black Down, Yew-tree Heath, and Denny Bog, it stretches east of Lyndhurst in a straight line of five miles to the Beaulieu River. Cobbett, who rode across it after having missed his way, and hated heaths because they would not grow his pet swede-turnips, calls it "about six miles of heath even worse than Bagshot Heath; as barren as it is possible for land to be." From Lyndhurst the road gradually

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ascends, the soil all the way growing thinner and poorer, until the bare gravel shows in white patches and plains among the starved heather. Yet on the right, and at no great distance, are thick woods of the finest timber in England, and even on the crest of the hill, a fine rounded wood of beech and oak, Matley Wood stands up like a fertile island, with a sea of heather and bog round it. To the left lies the great stretch of Matley Bog, and to the right a narrow strip of hard sand where the road creeps round the head of the morass. Here is a picture which, but for the road and bridge, cannot have changed for a thousand years. A stream flows down from a wide valley in the thick woods, and spreads itself among green marshes, sedge, and alder copses, at the top of the bog, whose level and impassable plain loses itself in the black heath which stretches far beyond the railway into the southern forest. At dusk the woodcocks, which rest in the forest, come flying up from the bog to the



MATLEY PASSAGE AND MATLEY BOG.

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woods. On the last day of April in a recent year, at a quarter before eight, the woodcocks were already on the wing. Night was settling down on the heath, but the horizon was still light above the hill, and tall clouds were passing across the west. A sound came from the bog like the twittering of swallows on the wing, mixed with low croaking cries. Then a bird with steady flight, like that of a curlew on the mud-flats, came up out of the dusk and crossed the road, uttering its curious call at regular intervals, and making straight for the head of the woodland glen. This was followed by a pair, which, after crossing the road, flew tilting at one another, and turning and twisting in the air all round the semicircle of lofty trees which crown the hollow in the woods. Bird after bird then flew up from the bog, until the forest glen was full of their dusky forms twisting and twining, like swallows or fern-owls, against the evening sky.

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Next day a young woodcock was brought into Lyndhurst; it had been caught in the wood close to the Lyndhurst racecourse. The rest of the brood were seen hiding close by, with their heads laid upon the ground and bodies motionless like young plover, while the parent bird flew round and endeavoured to decoy the lad who found them from the spot. This young bird was a most beautiful creature, no longer covered with down, but fully fledged to all appearance, and adorned with the beautiful brown mottling which makes the woodcock's plumage one of the most perfect pieces of tone-ornament in nature. As the night creeps on, blurring every minor feature of the scene, and leaving only the faint gleam of waters and the black forms of the alder clumps from distance to distance in the bog, the cry of the wild-fowl, echoed by the dark wall of forest at the back, shows that all the natives of the marsh are awake and moving. The croak of the woodcocks, the calling and

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screaming of the plovers, the bleating of the snipe, and the harsh barking of the herons, winging their way from Vinney Ridge to the Beaulieu River, fill the air with sound, though the creatures themselves are invisible; while from the forest the yelping and screeching of the owls, the incessant drone of the "churr worms," and the whirr of the great wood-beetles, answer the calls from the open moor. At such times the stranger will do well to seek the road and return across the heath, for once entangled in the great woods which lie southward of the marsh, he may well be lost till morning. In the angle between this mass of forest and the railway lies Denny Bog, a more distant and even more picturesque portion of this irreclaimable waste. The words "bog," "marsh," and "swamp," are often used indifferently. Properly understood, they apply to widely different conditions.

A bog is a portion of ground lying in soak. In the forest they are found of all

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sizes, from the area of a dining-room table to that of Hyde Park. The rim of the bog is hard enough to prevent the escape of the water except by gradual soakage, and thus the surface is level. Yet the beauty of the bogs is known and appreciated by every "forester," though they are a fruitful source of disaster to riders who do not know how they often lurk under the very shadow of the timber at the edge of the sound land of the woods. There is a tiny bog on the edge of Gritnam Wood which may serve as an example. On the verge of the common which lies below the wood is a pretty little circle of golden moss, with patches of green grass, and pools of black water no larger than a man's hand. Towards the centre the colouring is as brilliant as that of sea-weeds and sea-anemones seen in sunlit water. The mosses grow into spongy pillows, with exquisite feathery fronds. Some of this moss is rose-pink; other kinds brilliant green, or tawny brown, and from the whole comes a

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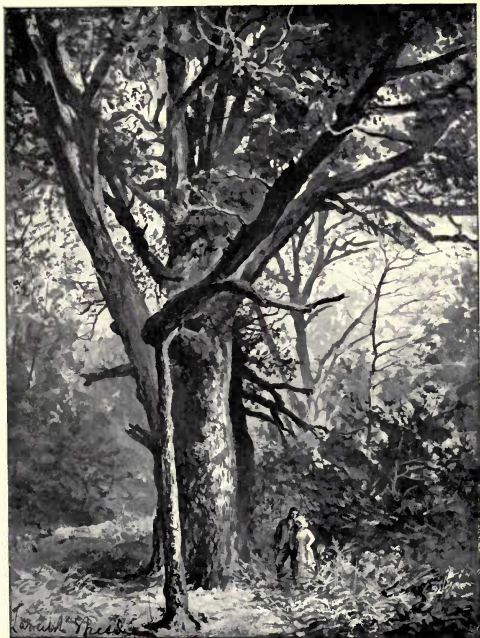
scent like that of fern-roots. A man may walk across in safety, but a horse breaks through the spongy surface, and nearly always falls, throwing its rider in the process, for the sucking mosses prevent any effort at recovering its footing after the first stumble.

Hérons, like the monks of old, seem always to choose a picturesque site for their home. Their home in the wooded hills of Wytham, looking far, far across the flats of the upper Thames Valley, or in the tall pines of Woolmer Forest, near the Deer's Hut Common, in the steep cliffs of the Findhorn River, and last, but not least beautiful, the heronry in the thick plantation at the head of the Penn Ponds in Richmond Park, where the London herons build almost unknown to the thousands of visitors who skate upon the lakes in winter, or ride and drive past them in summer, are each the chosen spots in their own beautiful vicinity. The heronry on Vinney Ridge,

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about four miles from Lyndhurst, is no exception to the rule, and the path to it leads through some of the finest woodland scenery. Part lies along an ancient Roman road which runs over the summit of Lyndhurst Hill.

From this the view ranges far to south, west, and east, while at its foot lies Alum Green, perhaps the largest and most beautiful of all the forest lawns. It is a kind of natural "savannah" in the woods. The extent of sound turf covers many acres, dotted with park-like groups of trees, surrounded on all sides with a ring of ancient timber on sloping banks. It is the favourite resort of all the ponies and cattle in this part of the Forest. The ancient path joins the main road to Christchurch, near the Lymington stream, about a mile below the bridge which crosses it on the way to Mark Ash. Here also is a bridge, of a single arch of brick. The stream comes hurrying down to this through the open forest. Three



THE KNIGHTWOOD OAK.

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tributaries have already swelled its waters between this and the upper crossing-place, and river and banks alike are deeper and even lovelier than before. The broken banks are planted, wreathed, and fringed by every kind of forest flower, shrub, and fern, of the largest and most luxuriant growth. Anemones, cuckoo-flowers, violets, kingcups, young bracken and hard-fern, woodbine and wild-rose, hart's-tongue, and moss like lengths of velvet cover the banks, the beech boughs arch the stream, and on each side the open wood extends to the utmost limit of sight. The otters make this part of the river their summer home. Two young ones were recently dug out from the earth a short way below the "Gate House," which stands near the bridge, and during the day they frequently lie up, either in the dry forest near or under the roots of a big tree by the banks. The habits of the New Forest otters on this stream seem very well known to those who are interested

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either in hunting or observing them. They travel a long way down the river at night, perhaps past Brockenhurst and as far as Boldre, or even below to near Lymington. They then hunt the stream upwards in the early morning until they reach the narrow waters, where they stay during the day. The pack of otter-hounds which generally visit the forest in the early summer usually meet at Brockenhurst, or some other point down stream, and pick up the fresh "drag" of the otters, which have returned up stream in the early hours of the morning. Hunted deer also make for the water at this point, and endeavour to throw off the pack before seeking refuge in the thick recesses of Knightwood and Vinney Ridge. A fallow buck finds the dimensions of the stream quite adequate for the temporary destruction of scent. Slipping down some tributary brooklet, it will pick its way down to a pool, and then, gently sinking, until nothing but head and horns remain above

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water, lies as motionless as a squatted hare listening to the shouts, talking, casting, and excitement on either bank, until, refreshed and invigorated, it springs once more to the bank, and leads its pursuers another circle through the woods and bogs of the forest.

North of the road, a little beyond the "Roman Arch," as tradition calls this bridge, is the inclosure of Knightwood. This large wood, though in part replanted in 1867, contains many remnants of ancient forest embedded in the new timber, among other the celebrated Knightwood Oak. Thus it shows in juxtaposition both the artificial and natural modes of reproducing forest. On the edges of the wood are close plantations of Scotch fir, in formal rows, which shelter and direct the upward growth of the young oaks between. In the centre, where old trees have died and been removed, or have in past time cleared a space which their present height leaves

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free to light and air, young oaks, birches, and beeches, are growing in irregular masses and of all heights and sizes. Among this confused multitude is the great Knightwood Oak.

This forest king stands in a smooth round lawn, all other trees keeping their distance beyond the outermost circle of its branches. The main trunk of the oak rises like a smooth round Norman pillar, and at no great height breaks into eight limbs which radiate from it like the sticks of a fan in very straight and regular lines. The extremities of these show signs of decay, but the tree seems as firm as ever. Its rigidity is such that in a heavy gale, though the tops of the branches move, the mass of the tree seems as stiff as if cast in iron. The limbs, though untouched by decay, are coated nearly to the summit by thick green moss, and the effect of this symmetrical mass of timber springing from a trunk of such magnitude—its girth is $19\frac{1}{2}$ feet—is beyond



THE HERONRY AT VINNEY RIDGE.

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description dignified and imposing. The tallest beeches in the forest are probably those in which the herons build their nests at Vinney Ridge, on the opposite side of the Christchurch road from Knightwood. The wood lies on the top of a fine saddle-back hill, covered with trees of every kind except elm, and of all ages, from old ivy-bound oaks to immense beeches and thorn-bushes wreathed with woodbine. It was enclosed till a few years ago, but there is a far greater extent of open turf here than in most enclosures, and since the fences were removed it has taken its place as a natural part of the ancient forest.

The beeches in which the herons build are so lofty as to lift their summits above the natural angle of sight, even as the head is usually carried in the forest. If it were not for the glimpses of the great birds silently launching themselves from the tree-tops before their disturber has approached the nest, the existence of the colony would not

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be suspected. It was the flight of a single heron slipping noiselessly from the nest, and soaring back in a wide circle to watch over the brood, that first indicated to the present writer that he was in the heronry. Even then the height of the trees, their distance apart, and the thickness of the foliage at the top made the discovery of the nest no easy task, had not the clattering noise made by the young indicated their whereabouts. The presence of birds of prey, though usually screened from sight by the thickness of the forest, was well illustrated by an incident which took place after the momentary flight of the old herons. A sparrow-hawk dashed up through the wood, and poising itself above the trees, flew from nest to nest, looking down into them from a height of a few feet, and apparently expecting to find a brood small enough for one to be carried off before the old birds returned. The hawk's visit only lasted for a minute, for at that moment five old herons came sweeping



THE FOREST, LOOKING TOWARDS LYNTHURST AND THE ISLE OF WIGHT.



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over the wood, and remained soaring in hurried and anxious flight far above the tops of the loftiest trees. When we retired to some distance and stood still by a timber-stack, bird after bird pitched on the trees, and after one or two subdued croaks of greeting, flapped down into the nest. The eyries appear absolutely inaccessible, built as they are at heights of from 70 to 90 feet from the ground on trees which rise two-thirds of that height without a single branch. Yet they are climbed, otherwise the inquiry as to whether you "could do with some young herons"—or young cranes, for both names are used in the forest—would not be addressed to those who are known to have a taste for keeping odd pets so often as it is.

There are a few ancient inhabitants who still know the favourite nesting-places, not only of the herons, but of rarer birds, such as the common and honey buzzard. The forest is said to be the last breeding-place of the

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honey-buzzard left in England, and there is no reason, in the present condition of the woodlands, why either of these birds should forsake the district, except in the prices offered for their eggs by oologists. The keepers protect a nest when found, and as the honey-buzzard does not lay till summer is well advanced, there is more chance of its nest escaping observation than for those of the early-building birds.

The strangest survival of any industry connected with the taking of wild animals in the forest was that of the "adder-hunter," probably the very last representative in England of a race who for upwards of two centuries have contributed their strange nostrum of adder's fat to the pharmacopœias of Central and Western Europe. The last of the adder-hunters was a strikingly handsome man, probably past his seventieth year, short, with curling beard and hair, and equipped in what was probably a unique costume for his peculiar trade. Thick boots and gaiters



BROCKENHURST CHURCH.

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protected him from the chance of a bite from the snakes. He was slung all over with bags of sacking, his pockets were stuffed with tins and boxes, and from his chest hung a pair of long steel forceps. In his hand he carried a light stick with a ferrule, into which when he roused a snake he put a short forked piece of hazel-wood, and, darting it forward with unerring aim, pinned the adder to the ground. Stooping down, he would pick it up lightly with the forceps, and after holding the writhing creature up for a moment, in which he looked like a rustic *Æsculapius*, transfer it to his sack. Mr. Mills, or "Brusher," as he was known among his friends, was a well-known and popular character in the forest, and his services in keeping down the number of adders were considerable. From March to September he ranged the forest, and his largest "bag" was 160 adders in a month. These he boiled down, and prepared from their flesh the "adder's fat," which he sold. Its virtues have been known for

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many centuries, and the favour with which extremely penetrating unguents, such as lanoline, made from the fat of sheep's wool, are now regarded, justifies the reputation it enjoys. The belief that it is a remedy for the bite of the snake itself may rest on slender grounds, but for the odd list of accidents given by the old man—"sprains, black eyes, poisoning with brass, bites by rats and horses, rheumatic joints, and sore feet in men and dogs"—it is admitted by the general consent of the forest to be a sovereign balm. In winter the adder-hunter's occupation was gone, but he had other modes of making a livelihood, and his lodging throughout the year was in the woods, in the snug interior of a charcoal-burner's hut.

Brockenhurst, unlike Lyndhurst, which, with all its picturesque features, bears itself like a little town, is a true village, embedded in the forest. Here the ground is stiff clayey loam, suitable for the growth of oaks, and consequently for corn and arable land.

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The square fields with hedgerows which fringe the village give an uneasy sense of limit and confinement after the free and open woodlands. But the cultivated land is a mere patch, lost to sight and memory in a few minutes' walk from the village. The church stands apart on a little hill, a perfect forest shrine, ringed by a double circle of oaks, between which lie the graves, sprinkled with primroses that have crept out from the wood and spread their flowers shyly on the churchyard turf. Like the modern church of Lyndhurst, the building stands upon a green mount. A giant yew, sound and vigorous, with a solid stem 18 feet in girth, overshadows the red-brick tower and reaches half-way up the spire. In front of this tree stand the dead fragments of an oak. The age of this ruin of a tree is almost beyond conjecture, but its position gives some clue to its date. Part of one branch survives. This limb, which appears to be some 6 feet in diameter, must have

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passed across the space on which the greater part of the yew now stands, at a height of 13 feet from the ground. Thus when the ancient yew was a mere shrub, not so high as the great limb of the oak, the latter must have attained its full dimensions; for the yew is a tree of perfect growth, straight, upright, and unmarred by crowding or shade, which must have been the case had it grown up when the oak-bough was large enough to overshadow it. The shell of the oak measures 25 feet round, and the centuries of the growth of the yew must be the measure of the decline and fall of this primeval oak.

At dusk, when the heavy clouds descend and brood in long lines across the woods, with bars of pale white sky below, the scene between Brockenhurst and Lyndhurst is singularly wild and pleasing. The white and waning light in the west is broken by the sharp outlines of the rugged firs, and reflected in pale sheets in the swampy pools

BRIDGE NEAR BROCKENHURST.



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which line the river. The woods are studded with clumps of holly, whose opaque black outline contrasts with the gnarled and twisted limbs of the ancient pollarded oaks, native to this stiff and vigorous soil. As the dusk creeps on the night-sounds of the forest are more distinctly heard. The splashing of the ponies' feet as they crop the grass of the swamps, the neighing of the forest mares as they call their foals, and the distant tinkle of the cattle-bells, sound through the trees, and shadowy forms of deer canter across the rides. Voices of children, calling or crying in the deep wood, are among the startling and unexpected sounds of night in the forest. More than once the writer has left the track and hastened into the grove, only to see the fire of a gipsy camp, with the children and parents lying at the mouth of their tent, lighted and warmed by the glow of their beech-wood fire. The smell of the woods on a still night, when dew is falling, is the essence of a thousand

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years distilling in the soil of this virgin forest. It baffles description; suffice it to say, as Herodotus did of Arabia Felix, "from this country comes an odour wondrous sweet." Nor are true perfumes wanting where wafts of the scent of sweetbriar come across the path, or an unseen bed of hyacinths fringes the road.

CHAPTER III

THE WILD DEER AND FOREST PONIES

Unique character of hunting in the "High Woods"
—Survival of the wild deer—A spring meet at New Park—Rousing deer with tufters—Old Moonstone—Laying on the pack—Full cry in the forest—Number of deer killed—The forest ponies—Their importance to the commoners—Arab blood—Their feral habits—Improvement and maintenance of the breed—The pony show at Lyndhurst.

THE forest was created as a hunting-ground, and such it still remains. The fox is regularly hunted, and the otter-hounds visit Brockenhurst in spring. But the beasts of the chase peculiar to the district are the *wild* red and fallow deer, which are hunted amid settings and surroundings absolutely unique in England.

Their continued existence is one instance

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in many of the natural survival of what is appropriate to the forest. When the deer were over-preserved by the Crown, their presence led to endless ill-will and demoralization. From 7,000 to 8,000 head are said to have lived within and about the boundaries of the forest at the end of the eighteenth century. Such a stock was far larger than the natural resources of the ground could maintain. In the winter they were partly fed by hay grown for them at New Park. Even so they frequently starved in hard weather, and it is said that in the winter of 1787, 300 were found dead in one walk. The reaction from this over-preservation went almost as far in the opposite direction. The Deer Removal Act was passed in 1851. The greater number were taken in the "toils"—high nets still kept in most deer-parks—and most of the rest were shot down by sportsmen. But they have survived all efforts at their destruction, and their increase in the



BEECHES IN THE FOREST.

Wild Deer and Forest Ponies

thick and quiet plantations is now steadily maintained.

Towards the close of the season, late in April, a day with the New Forest deerhounds presents from meet to finish a series of pictures of sylvan sport in the full glory of the English spring, each of which might be illustrated from the plays of Shakespeare and the old ballad poetry of England. Take, for example, the scene at a meet late in April of a recent year, under the tall oaks at New Park. Three men, born and bred in the forest, sons of woodmen, dressed in brown velveteen, thick boots, and gaiters, were leaning against the oaks. Each wore across his shoulders long thongs of leather, with loops and swivels of steel, working examples of those mysterious ornaments of white and gold with which the Master of the King's Buckhounds is girded as he leads the royal procession on the Cup Day at Ascot. These are the "couples" for holding the pack until the time comes to lay them

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on upon the scent of the deer which the tufters have driven from cover. Three or four red-scarved, black-muzzled forest gipsies strolled up and formed a group under another oak, little dark, active, laughing Orientals, a strange contrast to the sturdy foresters. The old adder-catcher next joined the party. He had hunted the forest as he came, and flung down upon the ground from his wallet a pair of writhing snakes. The "kennels" were good customers for his adder's fat, as it is believed not only to be useful to reduce sprains and injuries in horse and hound, but also as a remedy against the adder poison should a hound be bitten in the forest. A gipsy family followed, ragged, unkempt, "happy as birds and hard as nails," as a forester described them, taking the meet on their most leisurely way to Brockenhurst. An old woman, the patriarch of the forest gipsies, led the way, in a cloak of enormous squares of scarlet and black, which

Wild Deer and Forest Ponies

covered the basket she carried like a tent, and a poke-bonnet. Another younger woman, in a true "witch's hat," with elf locks hanging from below, and a tribe of most ragged children, sockless, shoeless, some pushing a little cart in which lay their tents, others straying and returning like little wild animals, were amusing themselves by imitating a pack of hounds in full cry. Soon the pack appeared, with huntsman and whips in coats of Lincoln green, and couples across their breasts; and though the hounds are no longer like those which Theseus bid the forester "uncouple in the western valley,"

"With ears that sweep away the morning dew,
Crook-kneed and dewlapped like Thessalian bulls,
Slow in pursuit,"

they are still "matched in mouth like bells," and their greater speed and symmetry does not detract from the pleasure of listening in the forest to

"The musical confusion
Of hounds and echo in conjunction,"

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which the hero proposed to Queen Hippolyta. A sharp-faced man "lunging" a forest pony, and one or two mounted woodmen and keepers, completed the party, until the "field" cast up rapidly, the master in Lincoln green, the rest in quiet blacks and browns. The hounds were then divided by the whips into groups, and the couples fastened, each thong being linked to a pair of hounds. Thus one man has to hold from three to six couples, and that picturesque poise of men stepping backwards with arms extended, and dragging reluctant hounds, which has been painter's and sculptor's subject for centuries, is reproduced in perfection. One ancient and sagacious hound, by name Moonstone, was omitted from the coupling process. Satisfied that for it the honour was reserved of finding and separating the deer, it trotted alone at the heels of the huntsman's horse, with an air of sagacity and importance most edifying to behold. After "secret consults"

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with one or two woodmen who had marked deer in the early morning, the huntsman led the way through thick and beautiful plantations, the coupled hounds and the field following in long procession. On every side the wood rang with the spring notes of birds, the laugh of the woodpecker, the cry of the cuckoo, while starry beds of violet and primrose, and everywhere the sight and scent of leaves and flowers, made an unusual and beautiful setting to the animated groups of riders, horses, and hounds.

The pack and field halted in a rough common deep in heather and furze, shut in on three sides by plantations, and on the fourth by the ancient timber of Gritnam Wood. The huntsman and a mounted keeper, with the old tufter Moonstone, then trotted into a large enclosure on the farther side. "Come on, old dog!" called the huntsman, as the hound stopped to feather on either side of the beautiful green ride up which the two men were trotting.

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The keeper pulled up his cob, and pointed to a clump of beeches surrounded by low brambles and thorns, remarking, "There were three bucks there this morning." The hound, which had been casting from side to side of the walk and through the cover, now bounded towards the beeches, and with a crash three bucks sprang to their feet and rushed through the wood, followed by the loud and musical baying of the hound. The deer did not break at once, and there was time to join the groups on the common, and watch the dispersion of the inhabitants of the plantation as the hound twisted and turned after the bucks. A big fox stepped out and a doe crossed, eliciting a chorus of impatient whimpers from the pack before whose eyes it passed. Then the three bucks crossed the open, followed by the single hound, whose deep voice was heard for many minutes as he drove them through the next covert. A blast on the horn now gave the signal that the deer had separated, and half a dozen willing hands led the

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coupled hounds to the ancient wood in which they were to be laid upon the scent. The long line of men and hounds, followed by the well-mounted field, hurried along through the long narrow glades of a most beautiful and ancient wood of oaks, or under arcades of crab-blossoms, ragged gipsies, brown-coated foresters, hounds, and riders, all gradually hurrying on, till the whole cavalcade was pushing at a trot through the forest. A pretty little black-eyed boy was leading old Moonstone (literally by a string). "I likes deer-hunting, though 'tis a cruel sport, for the deer does us no harm," he remarked sententiously, as the procession grouped itself round the huntsman, who was sitting alert and eager on his horse in a green ride at the highest point of the wood, where the single buck had crossed. All the hounds were now eager and happy, with heads up, sterns waving. In a few moments they were uncoupled, and dashed down through the wood. If the scene was not a reproduction of Tudor or Plantagenet

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days, the picture of the early poets is sadly misread. Hounds, all black, white, and tan, spread fanlike across the forest, flinging to right and left, each giving tongue as it owned the scent; master, huntsman, and whips in Lincoln green, under the lights and branching canopy of most ancient beeches; well-mounted and well-dressed riders, in the costumes, sober in colours, sound in texture, which good taste and good sense have elaborated into the perfection of simplicity, now seen, now lost, as they gallop down the glades, among the tall gray pillars of the beech-trunks, the gossamer green of little thorns, and bushes of ivy and wild-rose. Surely some such scene as this must have been in the mind of the author of the "Allegro" when he bids the reader

" At his window bid good-morrow,
Through the sweetbriar or the vine,
Or the twisted eglantine.

* * * * *

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Oft listening how the hounds and horn
Cheerily rouse the slumbering morn,
From the side of some hoar hill,
Through the high wood echoing shrill."

A favourite device of a hunted stag in the New Forest is to make for the wood in which other deer are lying, and disturb them, carrying the trail right over their "forms." The difficulty of keeping hounds together when so composed in a thick extensive plantation is very great, and it often happens that, while the main body of the pack keep to the scent of the hunted deer, small parties of hounds, or even a single hound, break off and enjoy a hunt on their own account. It is on record that on one occasion the pack separated into three, each of which divisions killed a deer. One doe was hunted and killed by three hounds only, who were found eating the carcass. The single efforts of a staghound which is driving a deer are often extremely interesting, as an example of the perseverance, skill, and

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instinct combined possessed by the modern breed. On the day the opening of which has been described a stray hound hunted a buck for a full hour without driving it from one large plantation, giving tongue at intervals, and sticking to the scent without the encouragement either of its own companions or of a single rider. At last a fine fallow buck, which had not yet shed its horns, broke from the enclosure, and cantered lightly across the open common, ringing twice or thrice round clumps of bushes, and lying down for a few minutes to cool itself, though apparently not at all distressed, in a boggy pool. It then leapt a fence into a plantation. The hound then made its exit from the wood, and took up the scent at a swinging gallop, giving tongue loudly at first, but soon becoming silent as it reached the scene of the buck's circle round the bushes. At least ten minutes were required to unravel these difficulties; but the check did not in the least abate the keenness of

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the hound, who brought the line up to the wood, and then with a fine burst of "music" dashed into the wood, and there pursued its solitary hunt.

Stag-hunting in the forest begins in August, and the meets are held through September, November, December, January, March, April, and part of May, thus covering a considerable period when fox-hunting has either ceased or not begun. Probably the late spring hunting is the most novel and picturesque experience which a day with the New Forest stag-hounds affords. But to those who enjoy the sight of hounds working, and at the same time have a taste for beautiful scenery, nothing could well be more delightful. In the season here mentioned sixty days' sport averaged about the same number of deer killed. Blank days are unknown, and there is the certainty of a run and of a day's enjoyment.

The New Forest ponies are one of the most interesting features both of the land-

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scape and the life of this wild country. Now that the deer are so few as to have disappeared from common view, they are replaced on the heaths, the lawns, the bogs, and among the ancient trees by the many-coloured, wild-looking forms of these almost feral ponies. There is scarcely any portion of the forest—the inmost recesses of Mark Ash Woods, the sea-girt heaths of Beaulieu, the sodden rim of Matley Bog, or the smooth lawns of Alum Green, of Stonycross, or Brockenhurst—from which the ponies are absent. There is no solitude in which their quiet movements, as they tread with careful steps, cropping the scanty herbage, do not break the stillness by day and night, no bare hillside so barren but the ponies can find on it some humble plant to crop between the stones.

The brood-mares of the forest are perhaps the nearest approach to the wild horse now existing in this country, so far as their life and habits entitle them to the name. Many of these have run for twenty years in the

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heaths and woods, unbroken, unshod, and almost without experience of the halter, except when pounded by the agisters for occasional marking. Their graceful walk and elegant shape, their sagacity and hardihood, their speed and endurance, and, not least, the independence and prosperity which their possession confers on the commoners and borderers who live in and around the forest, give to these ponies an interest apart from that attached to the life of any other breed of domesticated animal in this country. Nearly all the work done elsewhere by large horses seems to be performed in and around the forest by these miniature ponies drawing miniature carts. Singly, or driven tandem fashion, they draw bricks, haul loads of brushwood and poles, trot almost any distance to markets and fairs in carts and gigs, and will carry a heavy forester safely and well

“Over hill, over dale,
Through bush, through briar,”

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without fatigue or stumble. There is something in the fact of owning horses—be they only ponies—which seems to raise a man in his own esteem, and the jolly foresters have an air and demeanour, whether standing in front of their mud-built cottages or riding across the heaths to drive in their various stock, which belongs of right to the equestrian order of mankind.

“The love of pony breeding,” writes Mr. W. Moens, of Tweed, near Boldre, one of the most energetic founders of the Association for the Improvement of the Breed of New Forest Ponies, in his pamphlet on the subject, “lies deep in the breasts of most commoners, not only on account of its somewhat speculative nature, but for the animals themselves. The ponies running in the forest are rarely left for long without being looked after to see how they are doing, or at least being inquired after by their owners of those living near or working in the forest. Even the very children of



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borderers know to whom the mares and foals belong, so that the forest ponies afford much amusement to the forest folk, and nothing more easily excites them than a rumour that something or other is about to be done that may injure their interests as regards their pony stock. Some of the large breeders own as many as one hundred or more ponies, many forty or fifty; the smaller occupiers own as many as they can keep in the winter season. These, according to the fancy of the owners, are distributed in various parts of the forest, where they are marked by the agisters, or marksmen, by cutting the hairs of the tails in various ways. Thus the ponies haunting each quarter of the forest are known, the agister comparing his own marks with those made by the owner, and with his description of his ponies. Should any ponies stray into the parks, other pastures, or the lanes around the forest, information given to one of the agisters causes it to be soon known to whom the

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straying ponies, which go by the name of 'lane-haunters,' belong."

The present system of identification has taken the place of a far more picturesque and exciting method of marking the stock the "drift of the forest." This custom was a survival of an Act of Henry VIII., which ordained that all forests and chases were to be driven yearly within fifteen days after Michaelmas ; and if any mares or fillies were found which were not likely to bear good foals, "the same unprofitable beasts were to be killed and buried." Long after this drastic command had ceased to be regarded the "drift" was maintained as a kind of census for the marking of all forest stock. As nearly as possible on the same day keepers, agisters, and owners rode out to drive the different walks of the forest towards the pounds. These were not necessarily railed enclosures. The forest hardly contained a fence in the old days, and where, round the few villages, the roads

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were bordered by fences, the space between was ingeniously used as a trap. At Brockenhurst, for instance, the foals, ponies, cattle, calves, and donkeys were forced towards the lane which, with its high hedges, runs by the side of Brockenhurst Manor towards Beaulieu. Once past the manor mill, by the Boldre River, the gate across the road was shut, and the long lane was filled from end to end with a promiscuous throng of wild and tame beasts, thrusting, neighing, bellowing, and crowding, like the spoils of Amalek. From ten to twenty men would join in the work of collecting the animals from the open forest. This needed both skill and knowledge to perform properly. The wilder ponies, who had unpleasant recollections of branding and other rough handling in the pounds, would often make a determined effort to break back, taking their way at speed through the most difficult and treacherous ground. There, too, as in the runs of New South Wales, the animals which

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have been ridden in the business before seemed to take a pleasure in aiding to secure the wild ones, and the most successful means to bring in a fugitive was often for the rider to sit still, and leave the pony he rode to choose its own line and the time for making the last push which turned the other back to the herd.

The history of these New Forest ponies is by no means ascertained. They are not an indigenous animal, like the red deer, but the uniformity in size and appearance suggests a common stock and ancestry. The first is, however, probably due to the almost feral state in which these ponies live in the wild district, from which their food-supply is entirely obtained. No pony above a certain size is likely to survive in the forest, for the simple reason that it cannot find food to maintain it. In winter, by browsing all day and the greater part of the night, hardy little "foresters" of from twelve to thirteen hands high can just make

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both ends meet, though they are extremely thin and ragged. But anything much above that size would need artificial support, and its progeny would deteriorate. On the other hand, their size does not tend to fall much *below* the standard at which Nature sets the limit, which, in the case of the New Forest pony, seems to be from twelve to thirteen and a half hands. The natural appetite and needs of these hardy creatures prompt them to do the best for themselves from day to day with a constancy hardly to be understood by human beings whose minds are not concentrated by necessity on the absorbing effort to satisfy the hourly cravings of hunger. Nature levels up, as it levels down, and this is probably the clue to the uniformity in size of all wild animals, as well as of these half-wild ponies.

The condition of this stability is, of course, that man interferes nowhere. But the practice of selecting and selling away from the forest all the best of the ponies did

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threaten a marked deterioration in the stock about twenty years ago, not only in size but in quality. Now, the quality of the ponies is obvious and unmistakable. They have none of that lumpiness and want of due proportion so often seen in ponies; on the contrary, they are far more like miniature horses, and horses with a strain of Arab blood in them, as their fine eye, small heads, and high quarters show. Whatever the origin of the ponies in the past, this high-bred appearance *has* a history, and a very interesting one. They are of the blood of Eclipse, or rather of his sire, supplemented in later years by Arab strains of historical excellence.

The story of the Arab strain in these ponies is mixed up with one of the earliest romances of the modern thoroughbred. The Duke of Cumberland, son of George II., who in his later years became Ranger of the New Forest, exchanged an Arabian horse for a Yorkshire thoroughbred, which he called

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Mask, after the place from which it came. Mask was descended from the Darley Arab, brought from Aleppo in the time of Queen Anne, and from the Byerly Turk, thus possessing a pedigree going back to the days of Charles I. Mask was, however, sold for a small sum at the death of the Duke, and remained for some years in the neighbourhood of the New Forest, where he became the sire of numbers of forest ponies, and also of the celebrated Eclipse. More recently Queen Victoria sent to the forest two thoroughbred Arabs—Abegan and Yirassan—the former a gift of the Imaum of Muscat. Lastly, in 1891 the Association for the Improvement of the Breed of New Forest Ponies was founded at Lyndhurst, which holds an annual show of pony sires, and grants premiums to such as come up to the standard required, on condition that they are allowed to run in the forest. This pony show is one of the prettiest sights of the forest year. It is held annually at the end

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of April, just as the leaves are appearing on the beeches and thorns, not in some formal show-yard in a town, but on a lovely lawn outside Lyndhurst, called Swan Green.

The beauty of this little sylvan theatre has already been described as the first scene in the forest which presents itself on the way to Mark Ash from Lyndhurst town. The scene at the spring pony show in the same year was a busy contrast to the ordinary quiet of the little green. In these country gatherings the puzzle is to know where the people come from and how they get there. It had been pouring with rain all the morning, and the grove beyond the green was dripping with sunlit showers of drops. Yet a large part of the forest population seemed to be present. Under an oak on the hillside a white pony, saddled but riderless, was cropping the leaves from a thorn-bush, in company with four or five sooty, ragged, wet, long-tailed colts, dragged in from the forest. Smart well-groomed

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pony stallions were showing off their paces on the road on either side. In the centre a ring of about an acre had been enclosed with hurdles, within which were the ponies, their owners or leaders, and the judges; and around, in the every-day dress of working life, the men and boys of the forest. "Wild ponies and wild people," was the remark of a bystander. But the roughness of the forester only extends to costume; his manners are nearly always prepossessing, and his conversation on topics in which, like that of pony-breeding, he is an authority, is as brisk and epigrammatic as that of a farmer in the Yorkshire dales. Smart people in breeches and gaiters, old foresters with faces rugged as their oaks, short black-eyed "gippos" prying and peeping between the broad shoulders of the native race, and all the school-children of Lyndhurst, were grouped round the ring. Within it the ponies were being led round in procession before the judges, who, note-book in hand,

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were marking the merits and defects of each. A curly-headed sweep headed the troop, carrying, instead of a whip, his soot-brush, with which he occasionally whacked his handsome rough pony, a piece of "effect" which had evidently been carefully thought out beforehand. Most of their ponies had spent the whole of the last trying season in the forest, and showed evident signs of the privations they had undergone. Many had their rough coats still almost unshed. This produces a curious effect, for though the forest ponies are of all known colours, the masses of unkempt, shaggy winter coat which cling to them are of colours quite unknown to the eye which only sees groomed horses or those which have been out at grass for a few months in a meadow. All sorts of shades of soot-colour, sand-colour, dusty brown, smoky gray, lie in rags and tatters on their flanks, colours which alter again when, as in the present case, the mop-like mass is drenched with wet or drying in the

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sun. Yet the quality of the race shows in the fine head and large eye, and, above all, when they begin to move. Unshod and untrained, they step with all the careless freedom of a racehorse, giving that curious impression of moving *in detail* which the shuffling jog of a coarse-bred pony never creates. The contrast between the animals towed in by halters, with the mud of the bog still clinging to their flanks, and their civilized relations "in service," is perhaps the most striking feature of the show. But the condition in which the true forest pony appears after his winter in the open is an excellent guide to the size, points, and quality necessary for combining the maximum of speed and strength with the power to endure the hard life in which they are born and bred; and the judges seem to grasp the "true inwardness" of each pony's merits through any depth of matted hair and mud, and in spite of any want of flesh between hide and bones. The privations of the last

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season fell heavily on all grazing stock, whether semi-wild or kept upon the farms. Yet it was remarked that ponies left to run wild in the forest did better during the long drought than those which were "taken up" and put into pastures on inclosed land. They got into the recesses of the bogs and swamps, and there found more food and better than was available on the burnt-up meadows of the farms. These ponies must, in fact, be judged in the first place from their power to exist as wild animals; the other qualities follow.

The old saying that "a good horse is never a bad colour" seems true of these "foresters." In the endless circle moving round the ring there was as much difference in the colour of the animals as in the appearance of the men and boys who led, hauled, or *pushed* them round. On the whole, blacks and roans seemed the most numerous. Of seventy animals in the ring at one time, thirty were either roans, grays,

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or blacks. As for the two-year-olds, wild little fellows fresh from the forest, awkward, reluctant, shaggy, and "pixie-ridden" to the last degree, their colours were so obscured by long hair and wet that blacks, browns, and bays seemed all shrouded in a dingy earth colour. But all walked with freedom and grace, and most would, probably, have fetched from £7 to £12 as they stood. It is said that the yearlings, if removed to the good pastures of Sussex, Dorset, or Somerset, will grow a hand taller than their dams.

It must not be supposed, from the rough and poor condition of these creatures when seen in April, after exposure to a long hard winter, that their life is uniformly one of privation and hardship. The health and freedom which they enjoy together make them, on the whole, a very happy and contented race. During the summer each sire collects his little troop of mares, and so far as possible keeps them from the approach of

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any rival. In the spring, when the foals are born, there are few prettier sights than the little mares and their young, which they then bring into the most sheltered and beautiful lawns near that part of the forest which they haunt. Later in the year, when the sun is hot and the midge and forest fly—perhaps the greatest pest to horses which exists in England—begin to worry them in the thick cover and low ground, ponies and cattle alike leave the low ground at about 9 a.m., and until the afternoon frequent the “shades,” or open ground, where they stand close together, half asleep, swishing off the flies with their long tails. The accurate observer whose work has been quoted previously thinks that these shades are chosen according to the prevailing wind, “sometimes being chosen in the full sun, where the summer breeze is better felt than in the surrounding bottoms; at other times they will stand in a favourite part of some forest stream, or in a drift away over the

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railway. Blackdown is a favourite shade, being a ridge surrounded by bottoms, where there is plenty of good feed in the driest summers, with abundance of food and water. This district is perhaps the most favoured of any, being haunted by over 600 ponies and cattle, or more than one-tenth of the whole stock run in the forest." This was the district which it was proposed to take as a military rifle-range—a proposal which was successfully resisted, largely on the ground that the ponies would thus lose their favourite summer haunt.

CHAPTER IV

THE NORTHERN FOREST

Stony Cross—Rufus Stone and the Rufus Legend—

A brief for the prosecution of Sir Walter Tyrrell—The view from Stony Cross Plain—Bramshaw Wood—Malwood—Minstead and its park.

THE great ridge of Stony Cross Plain divides the northern from the central forest. Along it runs the ancient road from Winchester to Ringwood, and thence to the port of Poole. From its summit the whole of the forest—north, south, and east—is seen in endless waves of woods; and in the deep glen below its eastern shoulder is the spot where Rufus was killed by the arrow of Sir Walter Tyrrell on the evening of August 2, 1100 A.D. In the monkish stories the death of Rufus became a text,

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not for the vengeance which comes on the despoiler of the poor, as in the case of the death of the Conqueror's other children on the scene of their father's oppressions, but of the vengeance of God upon the robber of the Church. The fate of the brutal scoffer who mocked at the holy saints, who kept abbeys without their abbots, sees without their bishops, and the very throne of Canterbury itself vacant for three years, while he fattened on the incomes of the servants of God, is the theme of ecclesiastical story. It was almost inevitable that this colour should be put on the sudden death of the spoiler by zealous Churchmen. Those who see in the denunciations of the Church, and in the prophecies of an impending requital which were in circulation up to the day of Rufus's death, a motive which alters the part of Tyrrell from the unconscious instrument to the secret emissary of vengeance, will find some curious circumstantial evidence in an examination of the spot in which the

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King's body was found, assuming that that now marked as the place where Rufus fell is rightly identified. There is good reason for thinking that, in spite of the lapse of time, tradition in this respect is right. The place is close to Malwood, where the King was lodging the night before, and had dined and drunk on the very day of his death.

Malwood has for centuries, probably from the days of Rufus, been the residence of men whose business has been to know and visit every part of the forest in that particular "walk." Those in the house at the time of the King's death must have had knowledge of the spot where the body was found. Even if Purkiss, the charcoal-burner, who drove it in his cart to Winchester, did not mention to the other foresters the scene of so dreadful a discovery, it is almost certain that after the dispersion of the party at the lodge, the flight of Tyrrell, and the desperate ride of Henry to Winchester, in order to seize the succession to the Crown with the

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blessings of the Church, which had banned his brother, the domestics must have stolen down the hill to look at the body where it lay. The death of princes, even if not followed by the appearance of the caladrus, the ill-omened bird which, according to the monkish bestiaries, only appeared on earth to bring news of the death of kings, must always be a topic of awe and curiosity to those near the scene, even if fear closes their mouths and prevents them from paying due reverence to the body. The murder of Absalom, the beautiful, in the wood of Ephraim was known to more than the "captains of the host," though they dissembled all knowledge of the deed. The descendants of the charcoal-burner, who carried the body to Winchester, enjoyed for centuries the rights given them as a reward, among others, that of taking all such wood as they could gather "by hook or by crook"—dead branches, that is, which have not yet fallen, but might be broken off, though not

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lopped by axe or bill. Thus, the evidence as to the exact place of the King's death does not depend on history or upon general tradition. It is fixed by a concurrent and very coherent, though independent, set of circumstances. In the first place, by the fact which we have glanced at, that by the fixed and unchanging order of the forest there have lived in continued succession, within ten minutes' ride of the place, persons employed for 800 years to traverse daily that particular part of the forest, Malwood Walk, in the exercise of the same duty, the supervision of the deer and the wood, men to whom by the very nature of their business every tree, rivulet, and pool is a familiar object, frequently associated with some fact, far less important, such as the death of an eagle, or the leap of a deer, which is a part of the ordinary knowledge of the wood transmitted from one generation of foresters to the next. Secondly, the spot originally marked by an oak-tree was again

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marked by a stone, set up by Lord Delaware, then warden of the forest, in 1745, which stone was afterwards cased in iron in 1841. If the tree which in 1745 was in such a state of decay that its place was taken by the stone was the same which was standing at the time of Rufus's death, it must have been more than 650 years old at the time of its total disappearance—not an impossible age, by any means, for the fragment in Brockenhurst churchyard probably stood there quite as early, and Gilpin speaks of “a few venerable oaks in the New Forest that chronicle upon their furrowed trunks ages before the Conquest.” But the tree may have been a shoot, or sapling, or seedling, of the original oak, and still have identified the spot, just as the present “Cadenham Oak,” which buds at Christmas, marks the site of the old tree.

Taking these considerations as adequate to maintain the truth of tradition as to the exact spot at which the King died, the

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inferences from an examination of the ground are as follows: The King was shot, not *in* the wood, but at the very edge, almost at the last tree. Immediately west of "Rufus Stone" the good soil stops, and a very poor, steep, marshy slope begins, which runs right up to the top of the hill by Stony Cross. Wood does not grow on it now, and never could have grown, for the nature of the soil has not changed, and remains in the same condition for the growth or non-growth of timber as in the days of the Conquest. Again, the legend says that the King was looking after a wounded deer, "shading his eyes with his hand." Now, he would not have needed to shade his eyes had he been in the thick forest, though, as the deer would naturally run out of the wood across the open, and the sun was in the west—for it was late on an August day—the account exactly fits the supposition that William was standing where he is said to have stood, and gazing after the wounded

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deer as it ran out across the Stony Cross Common, when he received the fatal arrow. William, then, was in the open, or on the very edge of the wood. That he should have been shot by accident in such a place, with a weapon like a bow, seems most improbable. Moreover, it is likely that both he and Tyrrell were waiting for deer to be *driven* to them. The place is still a natural pass for deer, and the "Rufus Stone" stands on the neck of a little bluff, on either side of which driven deer would naturally pass on their way up the valley, and up which they do pass now when hunted. Supposing Rufus to have turned and shot one, his back or side would be presented to the man who was guarding the other pass below the knoll. On the other hand, it was a place which gave admirable opportunities for the escape of an assassin. Just above or over Stony Cross Plain ran the sound road, along the high open ridges, straight across the north of the forest, not to Lymington or Beaulieu, which

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would probably be ports friendly to the King, whose property the forest was, but across the Avon, out of the reach of summary forest law, down to Poole, whence ships were constantly passing over the Channel for Normandy. The course which Tyrrell is said to have taken fits exactly with the theory that he committed the murder here, with the intention of instant flight by this convenient road. The story runs that he rode to the Avon at the spot still called Tyrrell's Ford, and there, after forcing the smith to shoe his horse with the shoes reversed, killed the man, that he might not betray him. A yearly fine paid by the owners of the house where he crossed at what is still called Tyrrell's Ford is said to record the memory of the passage. Whether this legend be true in detail or not, it seems agreed that Tyrrell did escape from Poole to Normandy, and that there, after giving to Abbot Suger his account of the King's death, in which he claimed that it was



THE RUFUS GLADE.

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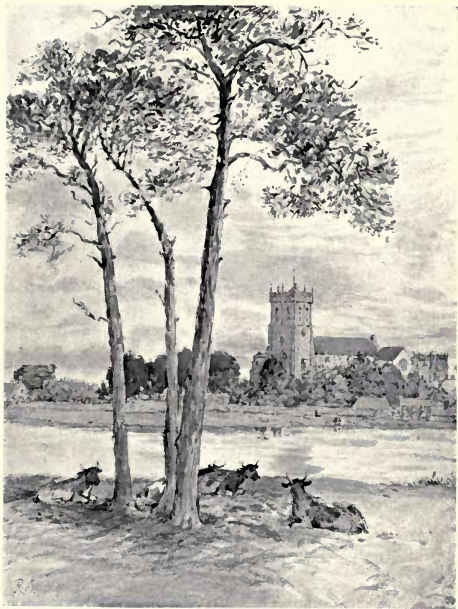
accidental, took the unusual step—for a man with a guiltless conscience—of making the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, in performing which he died.

The view from the height of Stony Cross Plain, which was the scene of Tyrrell's ride, gives perhaps the best idea of the extent of the forest and its relation to the splendid country which surrounds it. Along the back of the ridge, on the high firm ground, the ancient road runs from Cadenham, where it is joined by the main roads from Winchester and Southampton, straight across the forest to Ringwood. This northern ridge is almost the highest land in the forest. Beyond it, far to the south, the whole district falls away to the Solent, beyond which the hills of the Isle of Wight are distinctly seen. This "prospect" of the forest has nothing of the chess-board appearance usual in extensive views in Southern England. Right away to the sea-shore the eye sees nothing but woods, commons, and heaths, not in

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squares and patches, but in a succession of long ridges which seem to run out from right to left from a shoulder of higher land to the west. Lyndhurst spire shoots up in the centre, Minstead, Bolderwood, Rhinefield, Wilverly, and Christchurch bound it on the west. Eastward the eye ranges across Southampton Water to the long line of woods and faintly seen white houses near Netley Abbey and the old fortress of Calshot Castle. Thus the whole southern forest is within sight, with its natural and ancient boundaries of the Avon Valley, Southampton Water, and the Solent.

Looking backwards, north and north-east, the Wiltshire Downs are seen, and to the right the chalk hills beyond Romsey, abutting on Winchester. The two great cities of Wessex, Winchester and Salisbury, here have joint claims upon the forest. Timber for the roofing of Salisbury was cut in Bramshaw Wood, where it abuts on Wiltshire, and adjacent are the lands of the



ON THE STOUR AT CHRISTCHURCH.

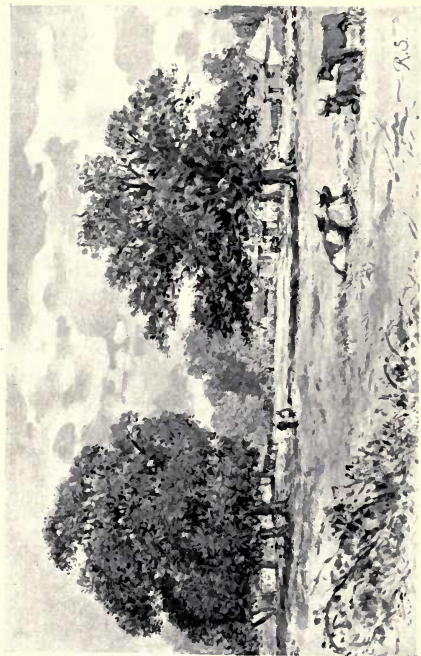
The Northern Forest

wardens of Winchester College. Days might be spent in gazing on this magnificent panorama without exhausting its beauties. Across the valley to the north, at the deepest point of which Rufus met his death, the beautiful beech woods of Eyeworth Walk and Bramble Hill are spread on the slope like curly fleeces. As the day goes on the cattle come trooping up from the forest flies on the open "shade" in front of the inn, and the air is resonant with the music of their bells.

Malwood, where stood the house in which Rufus lay the night before his death, and where, till the present generation, the keeper of Malwood Walk had his lodge, is the eastern buttress of this high Stony Cross Ridge. The late Sir William Vernon Harcourt's beautiful house now stands on the site; long, low, timbered and gabled, it is perhaps the most pleasing of the many new mansions which now stand on sites leased from the Crown on the ground once occupied

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by the old lodges. Between Malwood and Lyndhurst lies the beautiful village and park of Minstead. It is difficult to account for the change which the barrier of a paling makes in the general aspect of trees and herbage within and without. The park was clearly taken from the forest, yet every blade of grass seems different, and every tree has a "domesticated" look. Probably this is due to the work of the scythe on the one, and of the inevitable tendency to improve on Nature in the other. Outside, in the forest, the grass has never been mown, and constantly browsed and trampled by cattle. The trees have never been lopped, except as the wind tore off the rotten branches. Thus the grass of the forest is like a bowling-alley set with flowers, the grass of the park the common and cultivated verdure of the hay-field. The positive contribution of the park to the forest landscape is in the number of trees of species not indigenous to the forest which are properly planted round great



A GLADE IN THE FOREST, NEAR MINSTEAD.

R.S.

The Northern Forest

houses. Thus at Minstead Manor the long drive is fringed by masses of rhododendron 20 feet high. Their blaze of red flower on the dark-green background of shining leafage, the yellow clusters of azalea, and the few gigantic araucarias which rise from the mass below without a single dead branch, make a beautiful incident in the midst of the natural forest. The fine mansion and ancient and picturesque stables and offices, the kennels and gardens bowered in this mass of exotic shrubbery, with all the evidences of ancient and distinguished inhabitation, suggest a train of thought different from, but not out of harmony with, that which arises in the contemplation of the natural woods.

CHAPTER V

THE SOUTHERN FOREST AND BEAULIEU

Beaulieu Abbey and its history—The ruins at St. Leonard's—The Solent shore—Cobbett's admiration of the view—Sowley Pond—Wild-fowl—The Beaulieu River and Buckler's Hard—Nelson's flagship built in the forest—Commoners and squatters—The houses at Hill Top—Forest rights—Pigs and pannage—Swineherds—Rights of fuel—Future of the forest.

IN the purview of the forest the great and ancient domain of Beaulieu claims separate and unique consideration. Geographically it is the riverine and maritime district of the forest, in which the Abbey of Beaulieu itself, at the head of its tidal river, marks the point of connection between the inland portions and the beautiful Solent shore. It was part of the original forest of

Southern Forest and Beaulieu

William the Conqueror, and might have remained like the rest of the great hunting-ground, a wild and sparsely populated region, whose main interest to the modern world is that the changes which make history have been so little felt that in its present condition it hardly invites historical inquiry, because it presents itself almost unchanged by centuries as a fossil fact.

The act of King John in granting this magnificent domain for the support of an abbey of Cistercians withdrew it at once and for ever from the deadening, though conservative, influence of the forest law, and from that moment Beaulieu has a separate and dignified history, the human interest of which exceeds that of the forest itself. The resources and splendour of this domain are such that it has, from the appointment of its first abbot until the present time, maintained its position as an *imperium in imperio* through all the tumults of history. It is of vast extent, yet the boundaries of the Manor

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Bank have never been broken or encroached upon. Backed by the forest and bounded by the sea, fertile in corn, in wine—the remains of its terraced vineyards and the house of the winepress still survive—and inclosing nearly the whole of a splendid tidal river, it could exist as an independent whole, alike in beauty, position, and natural resources. Whether in mortmain—the “dead hand” of the Church—or in private possession, its resources have been consecutively in the power of a single owner, who has enjoyed a prestige from its possession such as is not conferred by any domain of similar extent. The privileges granted to the abbots by King John, and confirmed by charter after charter of his successors, were at least equal to those enjoyed by the Kings themselves when the manor was part of their forest. The abbey enjoyed every ordinary forest right, and some which were exceptional: the abbots might hunt within the manor and follow their game into the forest a bowshot

Southern Forest and Beaulieu

beyond its boundaries ; their hounds were excepted from the provisions as to mutilation if found in the forest, and to this day the manor shares with only one other—that of Brockenhurst—the privilege of feeding sheep in the forest. The Prince Abbots of Beaulieu sat among the Lords Spiritual in Parliament for 200 years, and after the confiscation of their estates the prestige of the possession of the manor seems never to have failed to confer upon its owners the dignity of a peerage, or a step in rank on those who already enjoyed it. In 1538 Sir Thomas Wriothesley, Lord High Chancellor, bought the entire manor, then worth £428 6s. 8d. a year, making, according to Cobbett's estimate, £8,500 of our money, for £2,000. He was created Earl of Southampton. In the reign of William III., Ralph, Lord Montagu, married the heiress of the Earl of Southampton, and was created Duke of Montagu. Edward Hussey, who married one of the coheiresses of John, Duke of

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Montagu, was created an Earl—Earl of Beaulieu. At this time the manor was for one life divided, for the other daughter of John, Duke of Montagu married the Duke George, her cousin. She left a daughter, and the Earl of Beaulieu dying without children, the estate passed to this daughter, who married the Duke of Buccleuch. The great-grandson of that Duke, Lord Henry Scott, became possessor of Beaulieu, and was created Baron Montagu in 1887. Thus the possession of Beaulieu seems to carry with it a patent of nobility as well as the enjoyment of one of the most beautiful estates in England.

The history of the abbey is perhaps as good an example as can be found of the magnificence, method, and good sense with which these great foundations were projected, developed, and maintained. The story which attributes the original grant to a fit of superstitious remorse may or may not be founded on fact; if it is, the sub-



REMAINS OF BEAULIEU ABBEY.

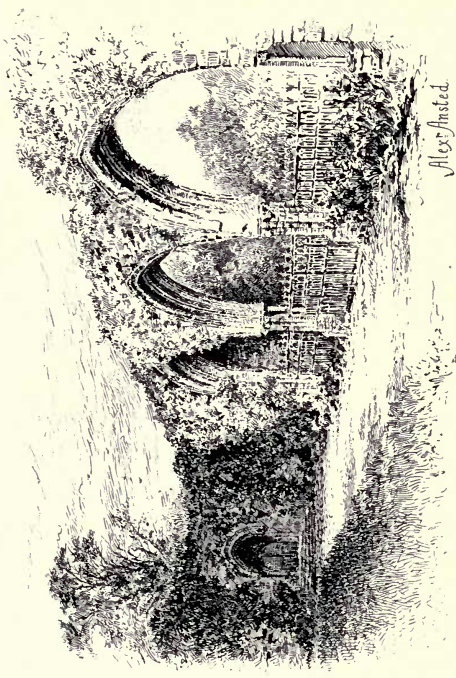
Southern Forest and Beaulieu

sequent record of the use made of the gift is in strange contrast to its inception. The tale is that the King summoned the abbots of the white-robed Cistercians to meet him at Lincoln, and that, enraged at their hostility to himself, he ordered them to be trampled to death by wild horses. His soldiers refused to become executioners, and the abbots fled. Next morning the King confided to his confessor that he had dreamt during the night that he had been brought up for judgment before St. Peter, who had handed him over to the abbots to be beaten, and that he was still aching from the blows. The confessor induced him to apologize to the abbots, and to make reparation by founding an abbey of Cistercians at Beaulieu.

There is no need of this legend to account for John's anxiety to have at least one body of powerful and well-affected ecclesiastics on his side. From the time of this great gift the Cistercians remained loyal to the King,

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even against the orders of the Pope himself ; and even during the interdict, when the whole realm lay under the Papal ban, as the result of John's quarrel with Rome, these English Cistercians celebrated Divine Service at the command of their abbots, for which they were excommunicated by Innocent III. The King restored to them their lands which had been seized on account of the interdict, and at the fourth Lateran Council, held at Rome in the year 1215, at which were present 312 bishops and more than 200 abbots and priors, the Abbot of Beaulieu, on behalf of King John, impeached Archbishop Langton of high treason for his share in the direction of the barons' revolt. The founding of Beaulieu was a piece of policy on the part of the King the reason for which is sufficiently clear by its results. But the magnificence of its development was partly due to fortune. The piety of John's son, Henry III., enriched it for conscience' sake ; one of his numerous



Alex. Ansted.

THE CLOISTERS, BEAULIEU ABBEY.

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grants was that of the profits of three years from his stud of horses in the forest to pay for masses for his father's soul. In his reign the abbey church was completed, and the greater part of the buildings in the precinct were either projected or begun. The church was as large as that of Romsey; but though the lines of its foundations have been traced, and are kept in evidence with the same care which is bestowed on the preservation of each and every portion of the ruins, the building itself has disappeared. It is hard to conceive a greater shock to religious sentiment than the ruthless destruction of this abbey church, while all that was useful for secular purposes was retained: the barns and cellars kept for the storage of the wealth which the land still yielded to its new owner, the stones of the house of God taken to build Hurst Castle, and the lead of its roof to cover the towers of the sister fortress at Calshot.

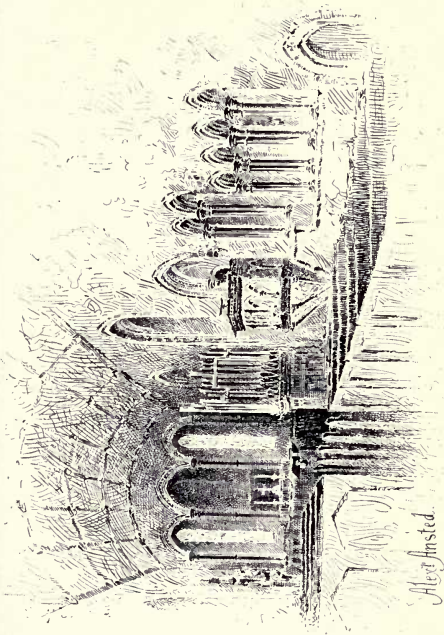
The buildings which remain are still

The New Forest

among the most beautiful ruins of the south, and serve to show the scale on which the abbey was conceived, and the wisdom which dictated the choice of its site. They lie on a gently sloping meadow, in which the great wall of the precinct stands here and there in gray masses, marking the lines of an inclosure a mile and a quarter round. The mass of the buildings, the church, the cloisters, the abbot's house, the guest-house, and last, but not least, the means and appliances which converted into wealth the commodities which fed the colony, stood close to the very head of the tidal river. There were the mill, the storehouses, and a quay, to which the ships from France, Spain and the Hanse towns came as the natural port of what was at once an outlet for the trade of the forest and the seat of a great industrial community. Part of this quay is submerged; but part remains covered with grass and flowers, and this quiet, butterfly-haunted spot is still called Cheapside.

INTERIOR OF THE REFECTORY, NOW THE CHURCH.

Alex. Ansted.



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Opposite and abutting on this quay are the ruins of the abbey, and the beautiful "Palace House," the centre of which is the lofty "Gate House" of the abbey, while round it the buildings of a modern mansion are grouped with such skill that the house forms a whole as completely adapted to its setting and surroundings as the abbey itself. Within the great wall of the precinct are the refectory, now converted into the parish church, and the remains of the exquisite cloister court, of the chapter-house, and of a huge chamber, still in good repair, in which the guests of the abbey were housed. This last is a good example of the simple, large-minded way in which the monks set to work to build for ordinary purposes. They built two gable ends as wide as they had space for, or where space was no object as wide as the forest oaks would give them cross-beams for their roof. Then they joined their ends by straight thick walls pierced with windows, thick and massive,

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with no need for buttresses or contrivances to eke out bad workmanship or save expense. There are several remains of their great storehouses, a wine-store, and a gable 60 feet wide at the abbey; while at St. Leonard's, a branch colony nearer to the Solent, is probably the largest building of its kind existing. In the ruins of the abbey there are enough relics of interest to give material for days of minute inquiry.

It is hard to understand why Cobbett, whose eye for scenery and admiration for the great religious foundations destroyed by Henry VIII. might have been expected to make him view with sympathy and appreciation a scene in which two such elements of interest are combined, is rather cold in his praises of Beaulieu. "The abbey," he writes in his "Ride from Lyndhurst to Godalming," "is not situated in a very fine place. The situation is low; the lands above it rather a swamp than otherwise"—he must mean the lands higher up the



THE GATE-HOUSE, BEAULIEU.

Southern Forest and Beaulieu

stream, for the slopes above the abbey were the ancient site of vineyards, and necessarily dry and sunny—"pretty enough altogether," he continues, "but by no means a fine place." Few people will be inclined to assent to this. As a site for the colony for which it was chosen, Beaulieu is almost perfect. The lake above the river, and below meadows so rich that the elms grow there to a size which rivals the forest oaks, the background of magnificent woods which run back for a mile to the crest of the great plain of Beaulieu Heath, which lies above, give an air of propriety and richness to the surroundings of the abbey for which it would be difficult to find a parallel elsewhere. The view of the whole looking up the river, the natural approach at a time when the forest was a trackless half-desert region, towards the abbey, the bridge, and the little cluster of houses and the mill which overhung the dark pool below the river, made it as fine a place to *look at*—which we take to be the

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meaning of Beaulieu—as could be desired, and one of the most beautiful heads of an estuary which can be found in England.¹ Cobbett, however, had seen another part of the ancient domain of the abbey before spending any time at Beaulieu itself, a place which he declared to have impressed him far more favourably. Neither Cobbett's conclusions nor, so far as modern authority goes, his archæology, seems quite consonant with facts. But the accident which took him past Beaulieu to the ruins at St. Leonard's led incidentally to a description of that unrivalled view from the maritime side of the monks' domain which is well worth quoting. "Happening to meet a man before I got into the village, I, pointing with my whip across towards the abbey, said to the man, 'I suppose there is a bridge down here to get across to the abbey.' 'That's

¹ A good inn, the Montagu Arms, with modern comfort and old prices, must be counted among the attractions of Beaulieu.

Southern Forest and Beaulieu

not the abbey, sir,' says he. 'The abbey is about four miles further on.' Having chapter and verse for it, I pushed on towards farmer John Biel's. When I got there I really thought at first that this must have been the site of the Abbey of Beaulieu; because, the name meaning *fine place*, this was a thousand times finer place than that where the abbey, as I afterwards found, really stood. After looking about for some time, I was satisfied that it had not been an abbey; but the place is one of the finest that ever was seen in this world. It stands at about half a mile distance from the water's edge at high-water mark, and at about the middle of the space along the coast from Calshot Castle to Lymington Haven. To the right you see Hurst Castle and that narrow passage called the Needles; and to the left you see Spithead, and all the ships that are sailing or lie anywhere opposite Portsmouth. The Isle of Wight is right before you, and you have in view at one

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and the same time the towns of Yarmouth, Newtown, Cowes, and Newport, with all the beautiful fields of the island lying upon the side of a great bank before and going up the ridge of hills in the middle of the island.

“The ruins consist of part of the walls of a building about 200 feet long and 40 wide. It has been turned into a barn, in part, and the rest into cattle-sheds. But there is another ruin, which was a church or chapel, and stands very near to the farmhouse. This little church or chapel appears to have been a very beautiful building. A part only of its walls are standing, but you see, by what remains of the arches, that it was finished in a manner the most elegant and expensive of the day in which it was built. Part of the outside of the building is now surrounded by the farmer's garden. The interior is partly a pig-sty, partly a goose-pen.”

Cobbett declared these ruins to have been

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once the hospital of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem. Modern authorities say that it was a branch establishment of the Beaulieu monks, containing their enormous granary, a chapel, and the lodging for the workers of iron at Sowley and of the salt-pits on the shore. Everything remains as it was in Cobbett's time, except that the last of the race of John Biel has departed from the farm. But the beautiful little chapel is no longer a goose-pen, but covered—floor, walls, and windows—with a wonderful growth of plants and weeds. It abuts on the garden of the farm, a handsome, solid old house with low comfortable rooms and a row of dormer windows in the roof. Both gables of the chapel stand, and the remains of rich niches and carved work peep out from the ivy and trailing plants. Flowers blossom all over these walls—roses, cranesbill, yellow barberry in masses, bramble-blossoms, old garden herbs, fennel and rue, yellow mustard, honesty, and beds of "burrs" and pink

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nettle. It is a perfect sun-trap, and the black ivy-berries are as big as currants, and in bunches so heavy they hang their heads. But the remains of the enormous barn are the great sight of the place. It is far larger than Cobbett says. The present writer makes it 80 paces long and 25 wide. The gable ends are colossal, built up without window or buttress. Apparently the task of providing a new roof to cover this huge and high-pitched span was beyond the powers of later generations, so the front wall was moved back many paces and a narrower and meaner building fitted within the old one. The stock-doves fly out of the crevices in these huge gables as if out of a cliff. Every buttress on the side walls is "trimmed" with golden fringes of hard-fern, and the ivy stems on the eastern end resemble the knots in ship's cables.

All the way down through the manor towards the south the ground falls gradually

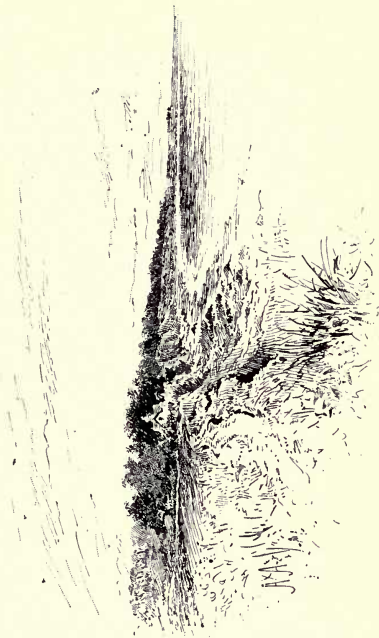
Southern Forest and Beaulieu

lower and lower, divided pretty equally between woods and arable land, with fine farmhouses; the view of the blue Solent opens out in the way Cobbett describes. *Belle Vue* rather than *Beaulieu* would be an appropriate name, the former being proper rather to the place you look *from* than the place you look *at*. The coast of the forest is here so sheltered by the screen of the Isle of Wight hills that it is not till within half a mile of the shore, beyond the ruins of St. Leonard's, that the tops of the oaks begin to incline in one direction, the certain sign of sea-breezes. The cultivated fields run down almost to the beach, and part-ridges may be seen feeding in the growing corn within a stone's-throw of the breakers. Seen across the narrow waters, the line of the island stretches back eastward beyond the line of sight, and the visitor might imagine himself on the shores of the Hellespont, separated only from another continent by the narrow strip of dissociable ocean,

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guarded, like the entrance to the Propontis, by castles and fortresses, where the parapets and battlements of Hurst break the line of sky, and the series of batteries, old and new, line the opposite coast with signs and tokens that here also are set the gates of empire. The long low sweep of shore which runs from the sandspit at the mouth of the Beaulieu River to the point at which it begins to be silted up by the mud deposits of the Lymington River is fronted by shingle, and crossed by innumerable groins of oak trunks driven deep into the ground. Between these the shore slopes up to a green bank, which makes a beautiful turf drive within a few yards of the sea, backed by hedges as green and luxuriant as any on the manor and fields of growing crops. It is not difficult to picture the "joy in harvest" of those whose lot it is to cut and reap the corn by this lovely inland sea, where a man may leave binding the sheaves, or the mowers rest at midday, and cross the fence to where

THE EDGE OF THE FOREST, NEAR LYMINGTON.



Southern Forest and Beaulieu

the waves come tumbling in before the fresh breeze blowing in from the Needles and the island fortress of Hurst. Further to the south the shore rises with low cliffs, and the shrubs and flowers of the mainland creep quite down among the shingle; bramble and hawthorn grow among the gray and colourless plants of the sea-shore, and among the sea-thistles and horned poppies tiny flowers of wild-rose blossom, so low that their petals look like little pink shells lying amongst the pebbles.

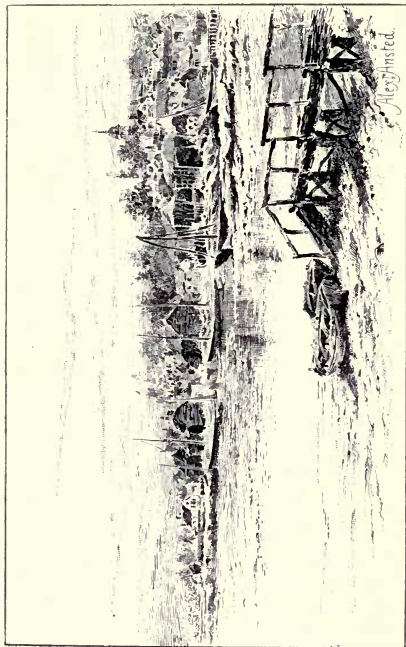
Lymington, the ancient port of the Royal Forest, as Beaulieu was of the Abbey Estates, lies further west. Its long, well-built street runs at right angles to the head of the ancient harbour, at the top of the great mud-silted lagoon which joins it to the Solent. Below the steep hill on which stands the town are the old quays, building-slips, and wharves, so close that the masts of the vessels seem to rise among the apple-trees of the gardens. In the meadows near

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the harbour's mouth are quaint old docks and the remains of what were once elegant pavilions and boat-houses. But the sea trade of Lymington has passed to Southampton, and its seaside visitors have deserted it for the Bournemouth sands.

The change from coast to inland scenery, which a few minutes' walk may show, is among the strangest features of a visit to the forest shore. A journey of a few hundred yards along the channel of a little rushing stream brings the visitor before a fine inland lake, sheltered on nearly every side by woods, and with deep fringes of sedge and reeds—a perfect paradise for wild-fowl.

In the winter this lake is the great resort of the duck, teal, and widgeon, which haunt the waters of the Solent, and come here for rest and quiet during the day, or in rough, inclement weather. Beaulieu is almost unrivalled as a resort of wild-fowl. In hard weather wild swans haunt



THE HARBOUR, LYMINGTON.

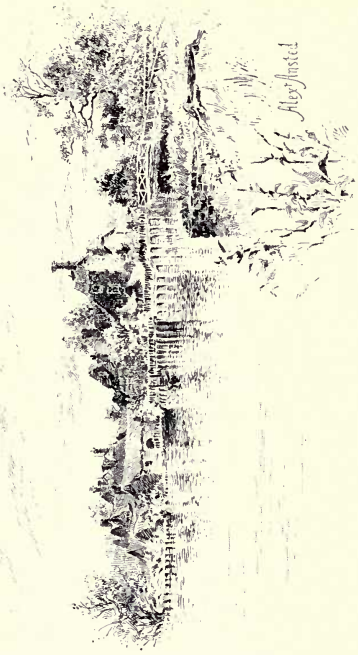
Southern Forest and Beaulieu

the quiet river, and geese, widgeon, and duck of all kinds are found in numbers which recall the days of Colonel Hawker, the "father of wild-fowling," whose exploits on the Solent in pursuit of his favourite sport formed one of the earliest and best of British books on wild life. The flamingo which was shot on the river, and is now stuffed at Palace House, was clearly a wild bird. Its delicate white and pink feathers are in perfect condition, free from any break or soiling, which is the certain mark of captivity in wild-fowl. Ospreys visit the river to feed on the mullet, trout, and salmon peel, and on the heaths beyond black-game are still found. It is said that these are gradually decreasing all over the forest, partly from the number of foxes, partly owing to the ravages of the oologists.

As for the Beaulieu River, there is nothing like it in England, or rather like that part which begins at Beaulieu Bridge, and falls

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into the Solent nine miles below. All the waters of those forest streams, those marshes, bogs, and swamps which you have crossed, leaped over, or sunk into in exploring the Northern Forest, are at last choked into a wide mere, which would be called a "broad" in Norfolk, by the narrowing of the valley and some ancient engineering devices of the monks, and then, through a weir opposite the gate of the palace, the fresh water from the forest above pours into the salt-water river below. Thus above the bridge are water-lilies, below it seaweed; and from that point a beautiful broad salt river, rapid and sinuous, sweeps through oak woods and meadows starred with flowers, like the meads above Oxford at Rosamond's Bower, yet never quite foregoes that dignity which it borrows from the sea, whose doubled tides advance to fill it, not twice, but four times in the twenty-four hours. Here, then, is a tidal river in which low-water is only a change for an hour or



BEAULIEU RIVER.

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two in the landscape, a river whose bed shows only yellow gravel, or little sheets of saltings crowded by feeding birds and backed by woods, where the banks are disfigured by no towing-path or foul factories, and whose silent waters are broken not by steam-tugs and barges, but by fleets of shining swans. Little winding creeks run up into the woods, bordered by close-set rows of dark oak piles and roofed by the clustered trees—creeks in which you might expect to find the keel of some prying Dane docked, while its blue-eyed crew crept up through the woods to spy out the land, or the hidden piraguas of the sea pirates who plundered Panama. Nor is this a mere fanciful suggestion from the scenery. War and opportunity lead to much the same results, whatever the date; and here, in 1704, Beaulieu Palace, nine miles up an English river, was fortified by John, Duke of Montagu, with a moat, walls and towers against the possible attack of French priva-

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teers,¹ a precaution which seems less strange than it might in the light of the plunder of the Earl of Seafield's plate by Paul Jones, as to which a curious correspondence appeared in the newspapers a few years ago.

The woods which run for miles along the river banks are perhaps equally ancient with the oldest in the forest—ancient, that is, as having always been wooded ground. But their character is wholly different. They are the woods of a manor, grown for profit, carefully tended, and full of the close and beautiful *sous bois*, or underwood, which in the forest has disappeared and left only the *haut bois*, or timber trees. The woods on the opposite bank have that “carded” look, like curly hair combed, which sea-breezes give to trees as well as to

¹ Others account for the moat and turrets round Palace House by the taste for French architecture acquired by the Duke in his residence abroad. Part of the woods were also laid out on the French system.



BEAULIEU RIVER, BELOW THE BRIDGE.

Southern Forest and Beaulieu

sailors' locks; but except for this and the cries of the lapwings and the redshanks in the rushy meadow below, there is nothing in the view which opens on leaving the wood to suggest that the water in front is anything but an inland lake. It winds between the hills exactly like a branch of Virginia Water. On the low ridge to the left is a square-built village of good old red-brick, brown-tiled houses—not so much a village, indeed, as a street, running at right angles to the river, and looking like a section of old Portsea cut away and set down in the woods. And that is exactly what it is—a fragment of the great arsenal, left high and dry by time on the shores of the Beaulieu River. Here, on the green slope where the cattle feed and children play, was built of New Forest oak Nelson's ship, the *Agamemnon*, 64—the ship which he was commanding when he lost his right eye at the Siege of Calvi, the ship which carried his flag in the Battle of the Baltic, one of whose

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crew, at the Battle of St. Vincent, tucked under his arm the swords of the Spanish officers as if gathering sticks for a faggot. Those whose boding fancy foresees a time when no sign will be left of the great industries of the North but burnt-out cinder heaps should consider the history of Buckler's Hard.

In the middle of the last century John, Duke of Montagu, Lord of Beaulieu, and owner of the great sugar island of St. Vincent, and inheritor of the rights of the Abbots of Beaulieu to a free harbour upon his river, determined to make a seaport at Buckler's Hard. It was a far-sighted scheme, in view of the American trade, which prosperity has justified by the creation of modern Southampton. Grants of land at a nominal rent and of timber delivered free soon attracted shipbuilders to the spot, and in September, 1743, the *Surprise*, 24, the first battleship built on the river, was launched. From that time till the end of the great war the work grew and prospered.



A CREEK ON THE BEAULIEU RIVER.

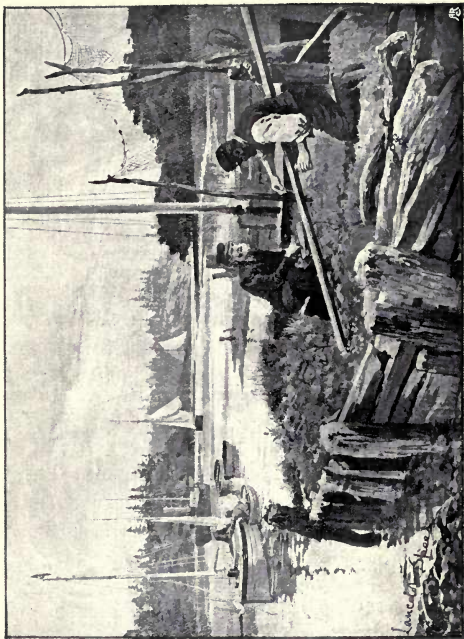
Southern Forest and Beaulieu

Frigates succeeded sloops, and battleships frigates, and each vessel, after it left the slips, was taken round to be fitted and manned at Portsmouth. The *Surprise* went out to fight the French in May, 1750; the *Vigilant*, 64, 1,374 tons, in 1774; the *Hannibal*, 74, was launched in 1810. The *Agamemnon*, after carrying Lord Nelson through the Battle of the Baltic and taking her share in Trafalgar, was lost in Maldonado Bay, in the River Plate, in 1809. The *Indefatigable*, the *Illustrious*, the *Swiftsure*, line-of-battle ships, and a whole fleet of frigates, were launched at Buckler's Hard during the latter years of the war. Such was the skill of the builders and the resources of the place that a seventy-four gun ship was not longer than thirty months upon the stocks, though 2,000 oaks, 100 tons of wrought-iron, and 30 tons of copper, were worked into her fabric. The whole of this great industry was created and directed by one man, Mr. Henry Adams, who carried

The New Forest

it on for sixty years, and lived till the age of ninety-two. His sons succeeded him; and the ruin of Buckler's Hard was due, not to the failure of its resources, but to the deliberate action of the Admiralty. The Adamses were commissioned to build four ships at once, and for not delivering them by the date agreed on were ruined by fines and litigation at the instance of the Government whom they served. Of their once prosperous yard, no sign remains but the houses they built and four grass-grown hollows in the shore, which were the slipways of the battleships. In one of these, filled with water at high-tide, the present writer saw the rotting skeleton of a wooden vessel, her stem and stern posts still upright, while from her back projected the broken and distorted ribs and bent bolts of copper. From a tree in the garden of what once was the home of the Adamses waved, as if in mockery, a ragged Union Jack.

The squatters' houses which fringe the



BEAULIEU RIVER AT BUCKLER'S HARD.

Lancelotti

Southern Forest and Beaulieu

forest are the subject of much amusing legend and odd domestic history. They illustrate the unsettled and lawless condition which prevailed in the district towards the end of the last century better, perhaps, than any other feature of the forest.

A favourite site for their colonies was on the fringe of some great estate projecting into the Crown forest. At Beaulieu, for instance, the boundary of the property is called the Manor Bank. South and east of the abbey it abuts on high, flat, open heaths; and there the line of division is a bank in the literal sense, a high rampart of earth separating the cultivated land and plantations of Beaulieu from the wild and open forest. To this bank the cottages of the commoners and squatters cling like swallows' nests to the eaves. It is said that in the old days of encroachments custom ruled that if a house were once built, *roofed*, and a fire lit within, it was not in the power of the Crown to pull it down. Occupation,

The New Forest

and not architecture, was the object of the squatters, and the game of house-building in the forest was soon played with a skill born of long practice, which baffled the spasmodic fits of energy on the part of the authorities. It reached such a stage of perfection that the art of building, roofing, putting in a chimney, and lighting a fire within the space of a single winter's night was at last attained ; and the curl of smoke rising defiantly in the gray of a December morning was the signal that the squatter had triumphed, and that henceforth he was irremovable. Some of these little cabins are still used, though more commodious dwellings have been added to them. Others stand, or are tumbling down, in the gardens of later buildings. Fifty years of settled and prosperous occupation have not given them the complacency of the humdrum cottage. They never quite lose the hasty, half-defiant look which is their birthmark, though their present owners enjoy a degree

Southern Forest and Beaulieu

of security, independence, and general goodwill which their honourable and industrious lives fully justify. The ancient contrast of the life within and without the "pale" is nowhere more picturesquely suggested than by the line of old cottages at Hill Top, at the edge of Beaulieu Heath. The cottages are all set in narrow strips of garden, won from the heath. These bits of ground are now fertile and well cultivated. The houses themselves present an odd contrast of original poverty and present comfort. In structure they are, for the most part, of the roughest, and by no means most durable, order. Some are of one story, some of two. The walls of all, or nearly all, are of yellow clay, something like the "cob" or "clay-lump" cottages and barns of South Devon. The roofs are straw-thatch, though in some this has been replaced by slate. The material of the walls seems hardly adequate to support two stories, for in many the wall bends inwards, and the lattice

The New Forest

windows and wooden frames seem to have taken kindly to the curvature. In some of the gardens the original house, which gave the claim to the land, still remains, a kind of doll's house, which was enough to support the legal fiction of occupation. Most of the cottages have little pony stables, piggeries, and wood-stacks attached, and though the exterior is humble and sometimes dilapidated, a glance at the interior gives every evidence of comfort and good living. The rooms are well and substantially furnished, with abundance of brightly-kept household gear. There are flowers in the windows, pretty curtains and blinds, and the small and pleasing evidences of a mind so far free from the hardships of life as to find time for the enjoyment of its minor amenities. Above all, the children are healthy, well dressed, and in many cases of singular beauty. There is one type which seems common in these cottages on the high uplands of the forest: gray eyes with dark

Southern Forest and Beaulieu

lashes, small regular features, and a complexion of the most delicate pink and white—not the common cherry-cheeked complexion of rustic good looks, but of a far purer and more refined order, which seems as characteristic of the children of the forest as their quiet and reserved demeanour.

Men living the life of these commoners attract an amount of interest and sympathy which must have its root in an appeal to some widely diffused and common sentiment. They are not a numerous class, the owners of from 1 to 20 acres being about 580. But these only hold one twenty-sixth part of the land entitled to rights of common, which are always attached to some particular house or piece of land. These are let by the great proprietors to tenants who pay rent both for houses, land and forest rights, and make the same use of them as is done by the small freeholders. Both are an extremely honest, industrious and independent class of men, among whom theft is unknown and

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drunkenness and improvidence extremely rare.

The existence of both is dependent upon the forest rights which they enjoy, the nature of which is better ascertained than their origin. In the case of many holdings the title is extremely ancient; in others a claim to ownership made by a squatter has probably been followed by a concession of common rights. Their present extent is very carefully defined. The first and most important is the right of pasture for all kinds of cattle but goats and sheep, except in the case of the owners of the Manors of Beaulieu and Brockenhurst: 5,469 cattle were turned out in the forest by commoners in the year 1892. The second is the "common of mast," or right of feeding hogs, otherwise called "pannage"; and this is so valuable that in a good acorn year each pig run in the forest is said to increase ten shillings in value, without cost to the owner.



HIGHCLIFFE.

Southern Forest and Beaulieu

“Pannage time” lasts, properly speaking, from September 25 to November 22; but though the Crown has the right to impound pigs found in the forest at other times, this rule is seldom enforced. When there are no nuts and acorns, New Forest pigs *graze* almost like cattle, cropping the grass with their teeth. Formerly they must have been the most characteristic animal of the forest, after the deer. Cobbett, on his ride to Beaulieu from Lyndhurst, says: “Of pigs this day we saw many, many thousand. I should think we saw at least 100 hogs to one deer. I stopped at one time and counted the hogs and pigs just round me, and they amounted to 140, all within 50 or 60 yards of my horse.”

The gathering of the pigs in “pannage time” was until recently one of the most complete survivals of Saxon days known in this country. The swineherd received from each commoner the pigs he wished fatted, with a small payment for each animal. A

The New Forest

convenient place had been previously selected for a rough sty, where there was plenty of beech-mast, acorns, and water. "In Bolderwood Walk," says Mr. Rogers, author of the "Guide to the New Forest," "there were many favourite localities, as it contained the greatest number of beech-trees. When the spot was reached by the collected hogs, they were generally tired by their long journey; but an abundant supper was provided for them, and they woke up next day refreshed by a good sleep." This thoughtful provision for the pigs' comfort is characteristic of the high respect in which the friendly forest pig is held by its owner. "Plenty of food was then given them for breakfast, the 'herd' meanwhile blowing his horn, after which they had a little liberty, a few old 'pannage hogs' accompanying them as leaders. They usually did not want to stray far, as food was very abundant, and in the evening were called by the horn and fed as before. After two or three days they were as obedient as



HERDING SWINE IN THE FOREST.

Southern Forest and Beaulieu

possible, and would assemble at any time on hearing the signal."

The old-fashioned, wild-looking, rust-coloured pig seems to have disappeared from the forest, and good black modern swine have replaced them. But they take very kindly to the life, and no one can know what an intelligent, cleanly animal the pig is by nature till he has seen him roaming half wild among the big trees, and apparently by common consent the leader in all the daily movements for food, shelter, and water, of the mixed herd of cows, ponies, and donkeys with which he associates.

There are two minor common rights, probably very ancient, both of which are much prized by their possessors. They confer the right of fuel on the cottages to which they are attached. One is the right of "turbary," or cutting turf on the heaths, the other that of "estovers," or fuel. The turf right is not much used, except by the forest commoners; and while stick-gathering

The New Forest

is so easy in the wooded parts of the forest a poor man need never want small fuel. The rights of "estover" are supposed to date from the reign of Queen Elizabeth, who enacted that "no inhabitants of any house builded since the beginning of the Queen Majesty's reign that now is, shall be allowed any wood in the same forest to be burnt or expended therein." This right was much abused, as whole trees of oak and beech were assigned, for the right now applies to the timber of the hard-wood trees. This is now supplied from the "waste of the forest," and by some curious result of the drawing of recent Acts, not from the enclosed young plantations, but from the old woods of the Stuarts or Elizabeth. The right is, however, being bought up by the Crown when practicable, and the number of loads is materially reduced.

The future of these ancient woods is a matter of some concern to those who are entrusted with the management of the forest.

Southern Forest and Beaulieu

It is feared that as the old trees die there will be few or no young trees to replace them, as the greater number are destroyed by the cattle when saplings. Meantime the 20,000 acres of Crown plantations are growing up to take their place, and as these are thrown open, the area covered with timber trees will increase instead of diminishing. Meantime, when frost and storm have widened the breaches in the Tudor woods, portions can be enclosed from time to time for natural reproduction and the preservation of that balance of wood, heath, swamp, and pasture which makes the scenery of the New Forest unique among the beauties of England.

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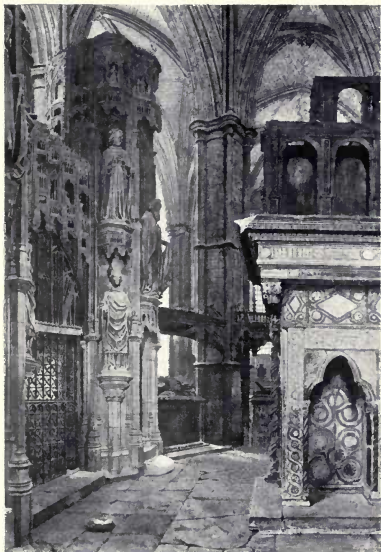
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